

Tales to Die For:

A collection of short stories

by

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Boyfriends

The smell of bacon fat curled my nose as the waitress placed the breakfast platter in the middle of my table. Chris reached over his water, spearing a sausage and a picking a few pieces of toast with his fingers and licked off the butter. My stomach almost lurched at that as I barely sipped my coffee. It was his brilliant idea to meet at the *Waffle House*. I was perfectly happy staying at home curled up on the couch watching the *Wizard of Oz* over and over again sipping my tea and brooding. But no, he had to come over at midnight and drag me out all because he thought I had to get out of my house. Granted I hadn't seen daylight for almost a week since all the curtains were bolstered and my apartment was an impenetrable fortress. He may have been my best friend, but that didn't give him the right to try and cheer me up.

“So cookie, have you gotten over him yet?” Chris muttered between swallows.

I took another sip of the burnt coffee wishing I hadn't. I put the cup down knowing that no matter how much sugar or cream I dumped into the swill it wouldn't improve the taste or take away the crunchy grounds. We were the only ones in the place besides the zombiefied waitress who was wiping the same spot on the counter, trying to stay awake. Chris noticed my gaze fall on the acne studded server and he raised his glass for more brew. It took her a moment to jump to attention before she shuffled over. Her uniform was yellow, coffee and grease stained, her hair falling out of her pins matching the color of the coffee stains. There were more lines in her face telling her story than there was coming from her lips. I smiled nicely at her as I placed my hand over my cup and decided to sip on my water which had a slight chlorine taste.

“Madison, did you hear me?”

“Yes, I heard you Chris. Eat your artery-hardening shit and let’s get out of here. Why did you have to drag me out? I was happy at home, now I have to go home and shampoo my hair several times to get the grease stink out of it. And how I’m feeling is none of your god damn business.”

“Like hell it isn’t! I haven’t heard from you for over a week and I know how you get when you’re brooding. How many times has Dorothy landed on the witch now?”

“Sixteen. But I can’t help it—”

“You’ve watched that movie sixteen times in a week? Gees, this guy really meant a lot to you. You haven’t watched it this much since Martin. He was what eighteen times. Good thing you have it on DVD.”

“No, it was Jonathon and twenty times. Thank you very much and I’ve already replaced the DVD since then.”

I took the moment to stare at the blob of ketchup on Chris’ plate. It was oddly enough in the shape of a slipper. He dunked his home fries into the glob and plopped it in his mouth. My stomach lurched forward and I made a dash for the bathroom. Unluckily I didn’t loose any of the coffee I had drunk and I think that might have made me feel better. After a few seconds of taking a few deep breathes I washed my face with cold water tasting the same chlorine aftertaste that I had been drinking. Bottled water my ass! Finally, I looked in the mirror and wondered if Chris was right. Maybe I was beating myself up too much.

My skin was slightly pink from the dunking it had gotten. My face looked liked it had raccoon eyes from the dark circles. My blonde hair was up in a ponytail and I was dressed in sweats and a T-shirt that had ice cream stains dribbled over it. Hey it wasn’t

my idea to come to this dump so Chris could satisfy his craving for breakfast junk food. I was an idiot; I really was letting myself get too worked up over a guy and one that I barely knew. It wasn't like we were serious or anything, it just happened I let myself fall head over heels for him, like I did with every guy, and when they stopped calling I always took it hard. The emotional roller coaster I was defiantly the epitome, there was no doubt about that. And the one that caught me every time I fell off was Chris; he'd heard my sob stories over and over again since high school. But that was what girlfriends were for right? Ok, so he was a guy, but he was gay so didn't that put him in the category of girlfriend? You would never know by looking at Chris that he was gay. He was the straightest looking guy I knew and his parents hadn't accepted that fact yet and kept trying to set him up with friends so I became his date whenever he had to do something with them. I think his father was onto the idea more than his mother was, but his mother was old school Southern. Very prim and proper, taught her son to say yes ma'am and no sir, expected everyone to hold the door for her, was nice to your face and then smeared you behind your back. His dad was just the opposite, a crass Yankee ex-mill worker that had been retired for years since they had won the lottery and integrated into slightly higher society than I thought they could pull off, but hell whatever. They raised a great boy who worked only because he didn't want to be bored and was the sexiest guy I had known. Except of course, he was gay so that put him in the category of just being my girlfriend.

I laughed as I thought about the times we went out to clubs and all the girls fawned over him, shoved numbers in his pants and all he would do was give me a lost lamb look and I had to pretend to be his date so he could scan for men along with me. It

was amazing how many gay men he actually pulled out of the straight clubs. For along time I used to be the one that would drag him out to listen to his sob stories, but I always picked a crowded restaurant and ordered something along the lines of a salad and listened to him as he hiccupped through his latest relationship that broke his heart. That was when I was with Ben. My ex-fiancé that called off the wedding, getting cold feet right before we said our I dos. Of course that was Ben, always had to wait until the last minute to make up his fucking mind. I guess that was the reason why all my relationships were fucked. I was insecure that they would all screw me over and hey look, they had. Including this last one, Dante. Tall, dark and gorgeous that I swore he was gay, but after Chris made a go at him he assured me that he wasn't. That was good enough for me and I went in for the kill.

Three months later arranging dates around my third shift job and getting to know Dante, I was in head over slippers. Chris warned me not to let myself fall so hard, but did I listen? Things were going great, granted we hadn't had sex, but I just figured he was good with "boundaries" or maybe he was impotent and was waiting for the right moment to take his *Viagra*. Who knew, but I wasn't pushing it. Damn he was an awesome kisser though and then one night we're getting all hot and heavy on my couch and he just goes stiff, not in the sense that I wanted, and says that he has to go. I was like; yeah ok sure whatever you have my number let me know when you want to get together.

That was two weeks ago and he hadn't called me back. Nothing, no card, no note, no rambling message on why he dumped me, not even, it's not you it's me shit. So last week I pulled out my latest copy of the *Wizard of Oz* and started watching it non stop. I was a sucker for the flying monkeys. They just did it for me every time. That and Glenda.

She just knew how to brighten my day. It was sad really. I knew that I really did, but hell my obsession for the movie has replicated to owning porcelain dolls of all the figurines and yes even my own version of the ruby slippers, I even had the outfit for Halloween and Chris had been the wizard so we made quite a pair. Still Dante hadn't even uttered a word that anything was wrong and that was the worst thing of all.

“Hey, you okay in there?” Chris' voice echoed through the door.

“Yeah, fine. I'll be out in a minute,” I muttered. “Damn.”

I looked in the mirror one last time and then walked out the door. I sat back in the syrup encrusted booth and watched Chris eat the rest of his breakfast platter. “So what are you going to do now? You still going to brood? Or you going to put away the flying monkeys and get on with your life?”

“I guess it's time to hit the dance floor again, find out who else is swimming in the shark infested pool? So you want to go out Friday night? *Allure* is having ladies night tomorrow night, we could both get in free,” I smiled.

“Bitch,” he leaned over and hit my shoulder spraying scrambled eggs on the table. “As much to contrary belief, not every gay man dresses up in women's clothing and gets on stage and lip sings to seventies disco. Besides heels kill my feet. But I can't go with you anyway, Alex and I have plans.”

I stared, wide eyed at him, as the waitress dropped our check on the table. There was a slight hop in her step as she was already calculating the tip. But I didn't grab it as Chris pulled his wallet out and threw a ten down on the table leaving her with around a buck tip. I raised my eyebrow.

He just shrugged. “Their coffee sucked.”

We got to the parking lot and back into his car. For a rich guy he didn't splurge. He was still driving the same '89 Escort with rust spreading on the hood that he'd had since it was new. Back at my apartment he was a gentleman and walked me to the door. He grabbed me in a bear hug and nuzzled the side of my neck. God, I wished he was straight. Finally he put me down and I poked him in the chest. "So when did this whole thing with Alex get so hot and heavy and you didn't even tell me?"

He blushed. "Ahh, well, you've been busy following the yellow brick road. And well things just developed. I think I'm in love. Can you believe it?"

"I think that's great. At least one of us is gettin' some."

Chris just hugged me even harder. "Ok, girl you go upstairs and get some sleep."

I just nodded and pushed my way into my place and saw the answering machine blinking. Holding my breath I pressed the button. There was silence for a moment and then a sigh. A throaty voice came on. It was Dante. My heart soared. "Madison, this is Dante. Look, I have to see you. I know I haven't called, but I have a good reason. Look, call me back."

I replayed the message a couple more times and then hugged the phone to my chest. Should I call him? What does he have to say? I fell onto the couch and toyed with the remote. Maybe I should just go back to Oz and forget about Dante. He had made these past couple of weeks hell. But I know if I didn't call him it would weigh on my mind. Biting my inner lip, I reached over and grabbed my date book from the coffee table and punched in his number. Hell if he wanted me to call him back I didn't care if he was sleeping or not. It was only a little past one and normally I should have been answering phones at the call center, trying to sell insurance, but I had switched shifts last week and

was enjoying a four day weekend. But you know if he called me this late he had to be up. He had mentioned that he was a night owl like me.

The phone rang, rang, and rang again and I swore I would get his machine, but after the fourth ring his deep voice answered sounding more annoyed than anything. Through the line, I could hear jazz playing.

“Hello.”

“Dante, hi! It’s Madison I got your message. Look I can call you back later, if this is a bad time.”

“Hey, no. I thought you were someone else.”

My heart dropped and instantly the munchkins were singing in my head. “Oh!”

“No, it’s not what you think. My mother is sick and I’ve been away with her. That was why I left so suddenly. She’s dying and well I just had to go. I didn’t mean to leave you high and dry. I’m sure you think I’m a jerk, but I was hoping that I could come over and see you. There was some other stuff I wanted to tell you, but not over the phone.”

“Yeah, sure whenever.”

“How about in an hour?”

I gazed around the apartment. Empty ice cream pints littered the apartment. The place was a mess and I was even worse. But hell, why not. “Sure.”

“Great, see you then.” He hung the phone up leaving me with the dial tone and staring at the little holes in the phone. I flung the receiver back into the cradle and went into hyper drive. I straightened the cushions, gathered all the trash, and turned the shower on to warm up while I did the variety of spoons and bowls in the sink. By the time I was in the shower I had shampooed my hair and cut gashes in my leg from my blunt razors, I

knew I should have bought new ones last week. Toweling my hair I threw on some jeans and a fashionable T-shirt and ran the brush through my knotted hair. There was no time for makeup and well that would have been a little obvious that I was desperate so I left that off. I mean I was desperate, but not that desperate.

There was a knock on the door echoing through my apartment. My eyes glanced at the DVD player and I sighed debating if I wanted to press play or answer the door. Guess which one I chose? Yes I opened the door and there was Dante in tight black jeans and a red T-shirt. He took my breath away as his dark hair was swept up in a ponytail and his dark eyes sparkled. He looked up at me and held my gaze and produced a single purple rose. It was the most thoughtful thing. I took it and nicked my thumb so that a bubble of blood came up and before I could clean it Dante snatched it up and sucked on it. The look on his face was pure ecstasy. He looked up at me, smiled, and ran his tongue over the flesh and yeah it was weird, but it was also the sexiest thing I ever had done to me.

Without another word, he pulled me to him and locked me in a deep throat kiss. Finally he pulled away leaving me breathless. “Wow. What prompted that?”

He came in, locked the door behind him, and led me to the couch. His hands slid over my shirt searching for a way to get under it. I nearly fell into his embrace, but decided that the evil flying monkeys were gnawing at my conscious. Something about this was all wrong. “Dante. This is great and all, but what the hell did you want to tell me. I get the feeling that your mother is not dying. So fess up.”

He laughed richly reminded me of dark chocolate rubbing over silk, sweet and soft, but it would still go to my thighs. “You’re very perceptive or I’m losing my touch.”

“Let’s go with I’m perceptive. Now what gives? You run off on me, break my heart and then come crawling back lying about a dying mother. So what’s up?”

“Okay, so you got me. I lied about my mother, but there’s something that I wanted to tell you. Show you.”

I leaned in close and kissed him lightly and he kissed me harder. I fell over onto him and ran my tongue across his lips. As I did, I felt something sharp. I pulled away quickly and came back tasting blood. Dante just looked at me and smiled seductively.

“That was what I wanted to talk to you about. You see. I’m a vampire. I fell for you hard and I wanted to be sure about you. And I think I am.”

I stared at him and laughter bubbled up. We were certainly not in Kansas anymore. “So you’re a vampire.”

Anger crossed Dante’s face. “Madison I’m serious. More than you know. I hoped that it wouldn’t come down to this, but—” He pulled back his lips into a snarl and I saw his fangs growing and he struck, biting into my neck. The pain was so abrupt that it hit me quickly and took me a moment to react and then the pleasure of his mouth on my neck. Okay, this guy was for real. No normal human being could make teeth grow like that and then move so quickly. Hmmm..the twister had picked up my house and landed me on top of the wicked witch herself. Finally, I came to my senses and started beating him on the chest to get him off of me. Not that I wanted him to stop, but a girl has to talk.

Dante moved back and I saw the smear on his lips and on his teeth as he preened the vestiges with his tongue. “Okay, I believe you. So what? You going to make me into a vampire or what?”

He just looked at me as if I had shot him. “You know, Madison. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have come here. I thought. I don’t know what I thought.” He looked as if he had come to some horrid realization. He bleached out like stone and I was a statue that he didn’t see. He moved toward the door and I looked at him puzzled and moved in front of him before he could get to the door.

“Whoa, you come over here, tell me you’re a vampire, and now you’re just leaving. What the hell?”

He signed and stared me straight in the eyes. “Honestly, you’re just not my type.”

He pushed me out of the way and in an instant he was gone evaporating into mist. I was left open mouthed, gaping at where he had gone. I turned on my heel and went back to the freezer, still in disbelief. I pulled out my last pint of ice cream and took out a spoon. I was more in shock as I opened up the pint and picked up the phone. But I hung it back up and knew that Chris would never believe me. Damn, it was just my luck.

Boyfriends sucked. Literally, it seemed.

I flicked the DVD on and even before the Technicolor cornfields came on, I decided to switch out the disc and put in a vampire movie that I had bought on a whim. Yeah, it was definitely time to find a new movie. No more trips over the rainbow for me.

From now on, I was sticking with my girlfriends.

Choices

Here I lie. Waiting for eternity to claim me. The earth is black underneath me, freshly dug and the scent stings my nose. The grass is flattened from the first frost, coating it white with frozen dew. Trees around me are dying, going into hibernation for the winter, dropping their leaves. Brown, paper-thin remnants of foliage skitter across the gravel road paths that criss-cross the graveyard. Soldiers of stone wait, silently guarding over plots that have seen hundreds of years with no one to tend them, save the old caretaker that carelessly chops the hay from around the stones, but he doesn't do a good enough job to reveal the names of the dusted inhabitants.

My eyes are closed. This is my favorite time of day; the space that hovers between full night and dawn. Stars twinkle in the distance, fading from the ribbon of sunrise weaving itself into the hair of night. It is the only time that brings me true comfort. My breath forms foggy white vapor as I wait. My red hair spills out, rippling on the dirt like watered down blood. Everyone has told me if I was truly Goth then I would die it black to make my pallor even whiter. I don't see the point. My hair is the one thing that makes me stand out. It attracts attention wherever I go. Then again, so do my black clothes, the black lipstick, the small ankh tattoo perched on the edge of my eye like a convicts' teardrop. Vibrant eyes peek out from behind lazy, long lashes.

The ground below me is cold from the night exposure, seeping into my bones even through the cloak I wear. I've been here for hours, just taking in the silence of the place. This is one of my favorite spots to lie, listening to the nothingness. Occasionally, it is broken by a howling dog, a snapping twig, but nothing to make me worry. The cemetery is a secret place only known to me and the caretaker that I have seen here and

again. I am normally leaving as he comes in, or vice versa, depending on the time of day. I've come here during the noontide hours, but the surrealness of the atmosphere comes out at night along with the other unearthly creatures that await the sinking sun.

I've seen my share of hovering mist forms rising from hard packed earth when the sun sinks. They float over to me, knowing I am alive and try to scare me. Running shivers under my skin and down my spine, tickling with their dead, formless hands as they try to terrify the living. Hardly anything makes me budge once I am settled in for the night. Not even a sudden BOO would force me to flee. That is what the dead don't understand. To me, it's the only safe place I can go when my nightmares take shape and break into the waking world and hunt me down. It is only on the hallowed earth of graveyards do I feel the safest. Even among the dead, there are beings that phantoms are afraid of. So I seek shelter on hallowed ground when my fears remember that I still exist.

I could resort to living in a church or some kind of nunnery, but I am not Catholic and my belief in God shattered along time ago. The only thing I believe for certain is that demons exist. His hooves are cloven and he has black wings of leather with holes in them, but that wingspan can eclipse the sun. I've seen him, known him as only a lover can as he came to me in the guise of a human. I loved him as any mortal would until he showed me his identity and I knew then that my soul was damned. Even while I run from him, part of me loves him still. Part of me yearns for him as it yearns for the other angel I have known as well. I'm not sure what twist of fate made me the spot light of a celestial tug of war.

Staring up at the sky I watched as the sun burned away the night. The sudden bursting of color made my eyes wince, but it also reminded me of the struggle for my soul. They had told me I had to choose and soon.

I had always thought that angels and demons were things of myth. However, it seems there is a whole world that is hidden from mortals, walking beside them and they never knew. Angels and demons walk beside us everyday influencing us, a whisper here, a little push there, anything to push humanity on the paths they want our souls to fall upon. It was only on a rare occasion that humans get to see the beings that are walking beside them. Some human psychics see them and steer clear. Other sensitives know they are there. I was normal, without a care in the world except to my own pleasure. Then I was in the car wreck with my sister. We both survived, me with a broken arm and leg. After being knocked unconscious and in a coma for a couple of days, when I woke up I started seeing things a little differently. The first thing I noticed was that people had strange glows around them. Others were so bright I could barely look at them and some were pitch as shadows. I learned these were the very beings that tried to influence us. Other people were surrounded by colors which I came to learn were auras. I could see ghosts walked dimly through walls. I told my sister all about this and she accepted my explanation. She has always been like that.

Six months after totally recovery, I was in a coffee shop when a man sat down across from me. The place was rather packed and I didn't think much of it as he wanted a place to rest his feet. I looked up from my book, noticing that he was something I wanted to slam onto my bed. Hay color hair was bound back in elastic. Leather pants hugged his

form and a blue silk shirt lit up his blue eyes. I blushed as he caught me looking. A smile twitched on his features as he sipped at his coffee.

“Cassie, I would be more than happy to indulge in your wildest fantasies.”

It took me a moment to realize that he was talking to me. I looked up from my book and saw his gaze settled right on mine. “Excuse me?”

“No need to be coy with me. I know you heard me.” He smiled as I surfed the room with my eyes, wondering if others were looking, but I realized that they weren’t even fazed at what he had said. Or they hadn’t heard him at all.

“So you can hear my thoughts. What am I thinking now?” I cleared my mind and thought of annoying white noise and a high-pitched beep. I watched him wince.

“It’s annoying if that is what you mean. But come now, we are beyond petty tests Cassie.”

Carefully, I closed my book and stared at this guy’s aura. It didn’t seem any different than anyone’s in the café. But there was still something off about him. “What are you?” I asked.

“I was hoping you would ask that.” He smiled and I noticed he had slightly pointed canines and I wondered if he was a vampire. Nevertheless, it was daytime so he would incinerate. Scratch that idea. Suddenly the café melted away into darkness and all I saw was him. He was standing before me. His skin was alabaster white and he had a wingspan that any raven would envy. Fear and amazement went through me. Then the wings disappeared and I saw them burn up. Horns appeared on in his forehead. His mouth was filled with sharp teeth and his fingers became sharp claws. His wings became that of a bat and he had cloven hooves for feet. I jumped from the vision then and was

slammed back into the café. He was there sitting in front of me calmly, sipping his coffee. I noticed his eyes had gone from blue to orange.

“What are you?”

He leaned in. I smelled sulfur on his breath. “I’m what nightmares are made of. And I’ve come to make yours come true.” He grabbed my wrist. Suddenly I was falling with him above me and then we landed on something soft. I glanced around seeing I was surrounded by tons of luscious pillows.

He pinned my hands above my head. He was strong and I couldn’t get away. He leaned in and his lips brushed mine. He tasted like smoky wood but he was intoxicating as I returned the kiss. Finally, he pulled away letting me breath. “What am I Cassie?”

The answer came to me as he let my hands go and undid my shirt. “You’re a demon.”

“I’m more than that, Cassie. I’m a fallen angel. We’re above the second generation that Lucifer created. We used to be in the choir and then we chose to fall.”

“So what are you doing here? Why me? What do you want?”

I watched as his forked tongue nestled between my breasts. He snapped his fingers and suddenly I was naked as was he. His extremely well endowed anatomy looked human enough. Without saying a word he lifted me up and impaled me on him. I cried out from the shock, from the cold of his body temperature, from wanting so much. I had never dreamed this. Had never even thought of it. He was just there. The fallen-angel held my ass, as he looked at me.

“I was there when the car crashed. Didn’t you ever wonder why it appeared that your sister hit something, but there was nothing there?”

We always wondered about, but there was an unspoken rule between my sister and me. Maybe that was one of the reasons why my sister had accepted my strange abilities. He moved me a little and a jolt of pure pleasure rippled through me. I moaned and wrapped my arms around him, feeling almost at peace with the odd situation that had jumped me.

“I was fighting when you ran into us. It didn’t hurt me, but when I saw you in the car I couldn’t believe how beautiful you were. I’ve had many human lovers so I touched you so you would be able to see me. And then I waited. I’ve wanted you. I’ve touched your dreams, given you glorious nightmares. Even steered you cleared of a few mishaps.”

He lifted me up slowly. My legs locked around his hips and I closed my eyes against the coldness of his dick. A low groan crossed my mind and he laughed as he nuzzled my neck, nipping the skin. My fingers wound in his hair as he went faster and faster, burying himself to the hilt until there was nothing but the sound of skin against skin. I couldn’t do anything as he fucked me. I was his and he knew that. Finally, he came spilling into me. He laid me down on the pillow and I saw the horn buds poking through the skin on his forehead. He didn’t change much, but the horns were black and small like young goats. I reached out to touch them. They were hard as bone and he moaned when I touched them.

“So you planned this. But that still doesn’t answer why you wanted me to see you as you are.”

He lay down beside me, his fingers trailing lightly over my flesh, tickling me. “At first, I wasn’t going to reveal myself to you, but the more I saw your developing powers, the more I realized that you could be so much more. You could be my true consort if you

chose. It's rare that my kind fall in love with humans. Even Lucifer fell in love with Eve. So the more I watched, the more I fell. Your true power lies beneath the surface. You just need the right guide to get you to your true potential."

I laughed. "So you want my soul? Please. I stopped believing in God along time ago."

"I want more than your soul," he grinned wickedly. "For now, this is all that we can have. Only until you trust me and love me as you would a human male. Only then can we be together. Please don't mention His name in my presence. I don't want to attract attention."

"Why?"

"Later." He leaned in and kissed me again. He was hard already and slipped inside of my already wet depths. My back arched at the sudden plunge because he was so cold. I cried out, but he covered my mouth with his in a deep kiss. His tongue probed mine until our rhythms were in sync and all I could feel was the pleasure of it all.

The sun has broken out, filling the sky with its brilliance beating back the night. I shiver even in my cloak as I lean back against the gravestone. Even though the light should have driven away my fears, they were still there. I knew now it was a mistake to give part of my heart to Daniel. However, what was I to do when you meet a fallen angel. It was not everyday that they dazzled humans. Normally, they only watched and nudged.

I closed my eyes as I felt a quiver in the air. Something was coming. The universe was going to part and on holy ground; I knew that it could only be Tristan.

“Are you running from yourself? Or are you seeking sanctuary?” His tone was slightly harsh.

I didn't bother to look over. I knew what he looked like. Red hair like mine was wound in a long braid. His skin was tan and his eyes a shade so dark I wasn't sure if I could pull myself from them. Unlike Daniel, his wings were ivory white threaded with feathers of iridescent blue. He sat cross-legged on the tomb next to me. I watched as flowers started to grow from the dead earth as he waved his hand over the land.

“I'm not running. I just wanted a little bit of peace. It seems that I can't get that these days. Both of you keep bugging me. At least the dead aren't fighting over my soul.”

“Your soul can be tipped. Just one wrong decision and you will be lost to heaven.”

“Is that all you care about? If it is then go back to where ever.”

He jumped down off the tomb and stared at me. “You know that is not all I care about. It's in my nature to think of spiritual matters before the earthy ones. Cassie, you know that I love you. It's just I don't want to lose you.”

He leaned in to kiss me. I felt the air around me stir as his wings embraced me. From the first touch, I fell into his arms. He drove me crazy. I pulled away from him and there were tears in my eyes. I had run so long. Was still running and truth be told, whether I loved Danielle or not, I loved Tristan more. It wasn't because he was an angel that had me under a celestial spell. I just did. He was gentle and kind. The complete opposite of what the demon was. And I was in the middle. Each wanted my soul for themselves. But I truly believed that Tristan also wanted something else.

“You know I love you.” His voice was a whisper that sent chills down my spine.

His arms wrapped around me. He pulled me into his embrace.

“I want nothing more than to be with you, but it’s complicated. You’re choice is more important than how I feel. If you choose him and fall, we’ll never—I’ll never be able to see you. You stand on a delicate balance. I’m surprised you can still come on hallowed ground.”

“So I choose him and I lose my soul. I choose you and I get to keep my soul, but lose you. That’s fucked up irony.”

Tristan bowed his head. When he looked up, I saw a tear in his eye. I didn’t think and angel could cry. “We can’t. Only when we are in love. Don’t you see that by loving me, you’ve given me part of your soul? It’s the same with Daniel. You gave him a part as well. That is the reason it is so important. One wrong move and you become like him. You stand on the brink. Daniel didn’t tell you what happened in the accident did he? The reason why you hit nothing? Or who he was fighting.”

“No.”

Daniel had intervened with one too many mortals. It was my job to bring him to justice. I had caught him and we were fighting. That was when your car hit us. An innocent bystander. I pulled your sister from the wreckage. The car caught fire. I tried to get to you. When he saw the fire licking at your unconscious form, he didn’t move to help you out.”

“But if the fire had me, then why didn’t I come out with burn.”

“I’m getting to that.”

“Daniel finally pulled you out. You were dead. But he pulled your soul back. You came to, screaming from the pain. You were aware of everything. You saw us. I reached out to you, to comfort you as it is my nature and we had caused this. But Daniel would not let you be. He enjoyed your suffering. I tried to go to you again, but he held you to him and made a deal. I was going to leave him alone and if I wanted to save your soul, we had to fight for it. One of us had to win you. He marked you with your tattoo. With that mark, your soul hung in the balance. But he took it one step further. With that mark, you were granted special abilities that you have discovered. Whatever you chose, you will become. In a way, it’s an elevation. It’s rare that a human is elevated. But it was part of the bargain.”

“So I either become an angel, or a demon. Great.”

“Yes, but you have to give yourself fully to one of us. Now you are in the gray area. You weren’t supposed to fall in love with both of us. But your human and didn’t know the consequences.”

“Tristan, why don’t you let Cassie choose for herself instead of telling her the sob story.”

I looked up and Daniel was perched on the tree branch above me. “Daniel go away.”

“You know you don’t want me to go, Cassie” His power reached out and stirred my insides. I moaned even in Tristan’s arms. I felt something poking against my forehead and when I touched the skin, there were bumps that had not been there before.

“Your soul is leaning towards him. I don’t want to lose you. You have to choose.”

I stood up and stared at the sun. Both beings were pulling me apart. They had told me that I was becoming something different. And I could feel it. Not even holy ground was doing anything for me. They would find me no matter where I went. The logical way was to go with the light even though I was drawn to the dark. I stood up and cried. “Enough. I’m not a rag doll. I can’t be pulled this way and that until my arms are ripped from the seams.”

“It is time to make a decision. We have both had you. Your hearts have been sliced in half, part for me and part for him. Choose wisely.”

“I’m human. I’m not an angel or a demon. I have free will whether either of you want my soul or not. That was how I was made.”

“She is correct.” Both the angel and the demon looked up at the caretaker that had suddenly appeared.

“And what would you know about it, old man?”

The caretaker smiled and suddenly his demeanor changed. Light surrounded him and I had to cringe to look away. “What are you?”

“He is Samuel. An Archangel.”

I watched as Daniel’s outward appearance change from human to pure demon. “She is mine. Her soul is falling.”

“She is no ones. You should know that. Humans are not pawns in the games between angel and demon. She makes her own choice. I have stood by and watched her soul struggle with a choice when she loves both of you. Her love has given you each a taste of humanity. True, it is her choice, but it does not have to be what you think. There is a third option. Would you like to here it, Cassie?”

I nodded.

“You can choose to stay as you are. Be a little bit of both, angel and demon. You would not be the first. There are a few of your kind floating around. Only you would be one of the first humans to be both. Normally the hybrids were a mixture of the fallen and our realms. What do you say?”

“What happens to me?”

“You have a soul. More than the others. One day you will have to choose. Your natures will fight. When your time of death comes, you will go to where your soul is more weighted. Does that make sense?”

“Yes. But what about them?”

“They can’t have any sway over you anymore. You will not have the extent of their powers, but you will be considered an equal. You can have angelic council as well as demonic.”

“It is a fair trade, Cassie. You and I would be able to see one another again. I do love you. More than this game.”

“And I do as well.” Daniel said as I stared at his goat like form. I felt the surge of love from both of them. They both spoke the truth. This way I could have both of them and it seemed a new life as well.

“All right.”

Suddenly, I was surrounded by bright light. I felt fire licking my bones. I screamed as I felt the flesh melting and my whole structure changing. I felt wings burst from my back and horns poking through my forehead. My teeth sharpened some and I felt my bone structure lighten. When the pain was all over, Tristan was holding me.

“We all have choices. Make yours wisely.”

Samuel was gone and I was being held by an angel. The demon I loved evaporated in a trail of sulphur and for once in my life I had no idea what was going to happen.

Memories of Home

The scenery was changing fast as I drove along in the early morning air. I already felt the chill of the changing season as I moved from South to North as fast as my car could race over the grey cement. It'd had been ages since I driven along the windy roads taking me back to the place where I had spent the better part of my childhood, waiting for band rehearsal to start, romping through local cemeteries looking for ghosts, or just talking among friends about times long past. But as all friends go, we separated after high school, but I'd never forgotten them and all the memories that we shared.

Especially gathering at Kry's house, sitting around the table while her parents were roaming the barn or out for the night, and we talked about ages past and shared memories from when we shared from past lives; filling in the tidbits of memory about an encounter or how we all lived together. As the years passed, somehow I'd dismissed many of the ramblings. Lately, I'd lost touch with most of my old acquaintances except one in particular.

Sometimes we would go years without speaking. Right now, Trevor and I hadn't spoken in three years, but as friends we were all still connected. At times, I'd always know how they were doing, in a weird sixth sense we had developed between one another. It had lasted for over ten years. It was that sixth sense that led me home along now with an impression of urgency that something was going on within the group. I just wasn't sure who it was. I had a sense said it was Trevor. I just hoped he was still in the area. Most had moved on. Molly moved a few miles away from her parents' home and she had seen Trevor just last month and that gave me some idea that he was still around. The only thing Molly had mentioned in between screaming at her young son was that

Trevor seemed different. But then again, he was not always the most social of beings. We were all outcasts in high school. To this day, I carried the nicknames and pain of taunting with me, but now I wore them like a brand. They had all made me stronger and gave me the sensibility not to give a shit about what others thought.

As I pulled off the highway, I realized I was close to my old stopping grounds, a cemetery off the highway that all of us had explored, looking for ghosts and goblins. I flipped the lights as twilight grew near, my favorite time of night. It was always the time when we'd all gather to watch for ghosts or at Krys', for our gatherings, to speak about the past. Getting out of the car, I pulled my sweatshirt closer around me and climbed the steep knoll that overlooked a small pond next to a tower that stood for no reason, but to add decoration. I watched the lights of the cars as they zoomed by. The night was cold to my Southern adopted body and even though it was the beginning of fall, I was still cold. The sky was purple and black mixing together and the night was peaceful, while the energy ghosts strengthened. They would soon be out whispering for attention. I just ignored them as they weren't my main purpose. This place held memories for me.

The night had been like this and it was near Halloween. All my friends had plans except Trevor. He'd agreed to meet me here to watch for ghosts. It was my last year and Trevor was a junior. We'd been friends since middle school. We had been coming off an eight month spread since we had spoken, and as before, he had been stopping me in the hall and making small talk. Now, we sat on the hill, watching the sun set. My mother was off dealing with her asshole boyfriend and I was alone. On a hunch, I called him and he showed up. We sat in silence and I was so busy I hadn't really had a chance to look at him. I'd always had a crush on Trevor. Now I noticed his black hair was longer and his

eyes were darker. We'd never spoken about dating as it was a taboo between us, but now I just rested my head on his shoulder. He didn't pull away as I thought he would, but he put his arm around me.

“This reminds me of old times,” he stated.

I said nothing except molded against his soft shirt and knew he was talking about our past lives together and how we speculated we were vampires and we all lived in Krys' castle. That was five hundred years ago, and the key that kept our little group of friends together now, because we all considered ourselves psychic vampires as the old days were lost.

Trevor never denied that fact of what we were, but much of him liked to live in the present and not dwell on the vampire. But he knew that I did. It was one reason why he had drifted from Krys as she kept the past alive more so than any of us. It was her escape from her parents, who treated her like shit. But I stood by her and lived much of my life in the past as well. For now, I was with him, smelling the musk of his skin, feeling the energy sparking between us, smelling the blood under his skin that ignited a faint hunger inside of me. We had shared time in the past where we were friends, flirting and having good times, but never more than that. I'd always been attracted to him but we never acted on it.

“Yeah, like old times, but by now we would be getting ready to hunt, letting the night fill us with its energy. But we're a different breed from what we were then. I wish that we were back then instead of the beings we are now. Know what I mean?”

“Yeah, it’d be nice to go back in time and feel my broadsword in my hand or trying to teach you how to fight with a dagger. It’s made me do a lot of thinking these past few months. It’s weighed on my mind. That’s why I’ve been away. I’ve been researching the past, honing my skills. And I’ve been thinking about what will happen. How we will all go our separate ways and what will happen. Will we still believe in what we are now or will it fade away like a bad dream?”

I lifted my head and stared into his dark eyes and saw some of the old wisdom that was there. I knew how he felt; knowing ancient secrets that only lived in our memories. We could only touch on those in our dreams, because as vampires, we were a different being then what we were before, immortals trapped in human shells, who once knew the glory of the night now were only granted the rewards of years instead of eons.

His eyes held me hypnotized and years of buried feelings passed between us. My lips met soft ones, and for a moment, we were locked in a kiss. It lasted an instant before we came back to ourselves.

Silence was between us as more cars whizzed by and I felt the ghosts in the cemetery stirring.

“Oh shit, Trevor. I ‘m sorry, I didn’t—”

“It’s all right.” He said as he got up quickly and dusted himself off. I go up too, not knowing what to say.

“Trevor, I didn’t mean—”

“Look, its no big deal. Let’s forget about it okay.”

I just nodded and listened to the ghost whispering in the tomb underneath us which was bricked up. He grumbled about becoming cooped up. I stared out into the

night wondering where we would go from here. Eternity loomed before me and for one brief instant I felt a little like my old vampiric self.

Trevor was wrong. I never forgot about the kiss. The moment hung with me like the ghosts in the cemetery. It haunted me at times. I'd had relationships, but my heart always came back to Trevor and the connections that bound us together in a web that lasted centuries. Even my friends, we would be together in another lifetime no matter what beings we were. Vampires, now or then, it didn't matter; because it was just who we were and I'd come to accept that over the years. I was a psychic vampire and learned how to use my abilities. Over the years I worked as a fortune teller, but my extrasensory gifts were just another part of what kept me connected to my friends and that was why I was sitting here hoping that everything was okay with Trevor.

“Thinking about old times are you?”

I turned to the silky voice next to me, not recognizing my old friend at first. It had been five years since I'd seen him. He's grown taller and his dark hair hung in a pony tail half way down his back. His eyes were dark and his skin pale in the moonlight. There didn't seem to anything wrong with him, but something was different.

“Oh my god.” I flung my arms around him.

He enfolded me and I smelled that familiar musk that was his scent. Finally, I pulled away and moved back on to the grass and sat down.

“It's been along time. How did you know I'd be here?”

He just smiled as he settled onto the grass next to me. “The same way you knew to come here. We're all bonded together. Isn't that what you always told me?”

“Yeah, but I wondered how much you believed it. You know what we said when we were kids might have all been bull, our imaginations playing tricks on us.”

“You never believed that. Everything that we went through wasn’t crap. Trust me. There is some truth in the old memories. You’ve known you were a vampire more than I ever believed. Even now, you live with it. If not, you wouldn’t be here, wouldn’t have come when I sent the message.”

“What do you mean you sent the message? When did you start using your psychic abilities openly? We haven’t spoken in three years Trevor, people change.”

“If you had changed that much then you wouldn’t be here. Kryss and you always believed we were vampires from birth, just locked in human bodies. I always missed the past and like you wanted to relive it. And then I did.”

“What are you talking about? You know we only relive the past in our dreams or when we get together and talk. You know how we can always get into each other’s head.”

He just sighed and shook his head. “Remember last time we were here you relaxed and kissed me?”

I felt the warmth in my face as I had just been thinking about it and he knew that, through our strange connection. “Yeah so.”

He turned and lifted my face and I couldn’t meet his eyes as I realized the attraction. What I felt from him was still there and in the moonlight he was even more handsome than he had been years ago. He brought my lips to his for a soft kiss. It was almost juvenile in its sweetness. His fingers trailed down my neck and rested lightly against the skin. I didn’t know how to react so I just went with it. Trevor’s lips moved down my throat and then I felt a sharp pain and his arms embracing me.

Trevor sucked at my neck and when he lifted his face I saw my blood smear on his lips.

“Going a little overboard aren’t you. I still have my old razor in the car. Call it a habit.”

He traced his thumb over my lips as I watched his eyes glow and the way he smiled brought back old memories. A jolt of fear went through me as he showed me his fangs.

“Those aren’t caps are hey?”

“No.”

“My God, how? When?” We hadn’t been making it all up, our memories were real.

“Rach. It’s all true. Everything we talked about. It all came back with the first taste of the blood. All my memories burst through a damn and all my old powers. It was like reliving the past and this century, what I was and what I am now. I remembered all of it and you.”

“How did it happen? When?”

“Does it matter? I’m here for you. I can bring everything back for you. Only if you want it too?”

I stared at him. The idea of leaving everything behind, so many memories and to recall it all. It had been something our group had talked about. We had always wanted to go back and relive the past. Even now part of me wanted to feel whole. Now to have it all laid out on a platter in front of me. I looked into his eyes and saw the Trevor of old starting back at me.

I only just smiled and kissed him lightly, tasting the copperiness of my blood, remembering what it was like to feel life coursing down my throat and live by night. He responded in kind and in that moment I knew that forever was mine again and so was he.

The Pack

The half moons of my fingers grew. The whites of the fingernails curled and turned black. I looked behind me and saw my feet elongating, the toes stretching. The pain that wracked my body was overwhelming. My heart increased in speed as I was on all fours, trying to work through the wrenching pain. My breath came in spurts and I had four sharp teeth. Panic welled in my brain as everything in me strained and pushed out, trying to reform, but my brain fought against it. I'd had pain before and the beginnings of transformation, but I'd always fought through it and regained control. Ever since I met Anton, he was the cause of what was happening to me. Before him, it had all been dormant when I was growing up. When we met, something in me knew him, recognizing him for what he truly was. But I never knew what it was until I saw him change. Then I saw what kind of creature he truly wasn't and what that part of me was that had been fighting with me since I was a child. All my life, I sensed that other people weren't like me.

I had met Anton by chance while waiting in line for coffee. As soon as the door opened, I looked over and saw him with sunglasses and he wore torn jeans and a raggy T-shirt with cut off sleeves and his hair pulled back in a ponytail. He gazed around the shop until his eyes settled on me. Then he took his glasses off. From the line, I saw his evergreen eyes. My nostrils flared at the scent of the coffee and I was dumbfounded as the cashier asked for my order, I mumbled something as I handed the chick the cash and watched as Anton sat down and began to leaf through a magazine. Each time I glanced over at him, I caught him staring at me over the pages. Either it wasn't an interesting read or he knew that there was something about me because even guys that checked me out

didn't stare at me that intensely. I got my coffee and sat down next to the counter and pulled out a book I was reading. After only getting a few paragraphs, I looked up again and noticed that the guy was gone. I sense of relief flooded me as the tightness I had felt left me and I went back to my book.

“Hi, do you mind if I sit here?”

I glanced over my book and Anton was giving me a shit eating grin like he knew I would say yes. I didn't say anything but kicked the chair out across from me and went back to my book, trying not to take notice of him as he sipped something with vanilla in it.

“I hate to bother you, but have we met before? You seem really familiar?”

I glanced up and noticed he leaned over the table and his voice was smooth as the vanilla latté he had order. “No. Sorry. I don't think so. I would remember. I'm good with faces.”

“Really? Me too. I don't know. There's just something about you. Is your family from around here?”

“No, I'm a city girl, but then again I was adopted so I have no idea where my birth parents are from.”

“Oh I'm sorry, How rude of me. I'm Anton.”

He smiled and his eyes sparkled and as much as I tried to be the good city girl, mind my manners, and ignore him, his warmth and charm soaked through my hardened exterior. Once I met his eyes, I was in trouble.

Placing my book on the table, I took his outstretched hand and noticed his fingers. His hands were rougher than I planned. Someone that worked outside, not the business

men I typed memos for all day and ordered their expensive golf clubs. God, I hated the layers, but hell, I liked my job and working with the wolves.

"I'm Lara," I moved my hand, got his coffee, and sent it sprawling all over the table and onto his jeans. It took a moment before either of us reacted. We watched the brown lake grow on the table, beginning to be absorbed by the paper of my book. Then everything went into normal time again and he jumped up and I grabbed some napkins and began patting down the front of his jeans where I couldn't help but notice that he was well endowed, but he took the napkins from me and held my hand a little too tight and met my eye.

"Lara." I heard him whisper in my mind. I got a sudden image of trees, the smell of pine and fresh air, crisper and I was running. I was in the woods and something was calling me home. Then I blinked and it all faded.

"Are you all right?" he asked me as I realized he was holding me up.

"Yeah, I should be asking you that."

"No, I'm fine. It's just coffee. You looked like you were about to faint. You sure you're okay. Maybe you need to sit back down."

I didn't argue with him and sat back down as he got more napkins and patted himself dry.

I regained my sense of balance wondering what the fuck had just happened. I wasn't crazy and I had heard his voice in my head and saw something. I wasn't crazy. As I thought about it, a familiar pain started above my heart and I grew short of breath. No doctor could figure out what caused them. For years, I was on medication to calm me down, but I stopped taking it. For the past two years, I'd lived with them and they seemed

to come around the full moon oddly enough which had nothing to do with my monthly cycle. I got that every three months and no matter how many hormones I took. Docs said I was fertile just strange. I lived with it. Now my breath came in pants, my head began to hurt, and I doubled over on the table and bit my tongue against the pain. My fingers gripped the table. Breathe came in pants and everything about me felt like I was on fire. Never had the attacks been this bad, I had to hold on, had to maintain control —

When I opened my eyes again, things were blurry at first and then when I refocused I found I was in a hospital. A place I was used to.

“Hey, you’re awake,”

I looked over and saw Anton in those same coffee stained jeans and ratty T-shirt, only he seemed sleep deprived and his hair was down over his shoulders. I couldn’t believe that he was still here. “Oh God. How did I get here?”

“You passed out at the coffee shop and they called an ambulance. I followed. The doctors said you should be fine.”

“I’m so embarrassed. I had a panic attack. I’ve had them for years, but I haven’t been to the hospital for one for years. Thank you for checking on me, but I’ll be fine.”

I sat up in the bed and looked around the bleak room, sterile. Somehow, it reminded me of my apartment. Nothing I did ever made me feel quite at home there. No matter how I decorated. Anton rose from his chair and took something from the draw at my bedside. I thought you might want to finish this as it got ruined at the café.”

He handed me the book and at once, I had the same idea of running through the woods. “What are you?” I asked, without even thinking.

He looked shocked. "I don't know what you mean."

I grabbed his arm and he looked at me, as I was slightly surprised at the force of my grip. "You do. You knew it in the coffee shop."

His eyes never left mine. There was a silence between us and the tension mounted. He leaned in and kissed me. It was rough at first and then more tender as he realized I wasn't going to fight. Then it was wonderful as if we fit together.

"We're the same you and I, Lara. You're precious. Soon, you'll know what you truly are." He squeezed my hand and then he was gone.

The next day they released me and said my attack was brought on by exhaustion. I didn't say anything but went home and examined the book Anton had brought me. When I opened it, I found his phone number. He really was sure of himself if he thought I would call him. But if what he said was true, then we had something in common. So I swallowed my pride and picked up the phone. He wasn't there so I left him a message and my number. Once I hung up, I thought about what happened. The first panic attack I had I was five. I'd been camping in the woods and I remembered suddenly that everything had been surrounding me. All the scents and sounds of the forest. I remembered it was wonderful and I wanted to run and chase after everything I heard in the underbrush. Suddenly everything hurt and I passed out. I woke up in the hospital and from there I had dreams of the forest and clear lakes and blue skies. As I got older and dealt with my anxiety attacks, I lost the dream and they were only a distant memory. Now as I settled down in my own apartment, I noticed that I craved to be in the woods again

like when I was a child. I wanted fresh air on my face and green grass beneath my feet. The walls of my place were confining, it was too small and the carpet artificial.

Finally, after waiting for the phone to ring, I was fed up and decided to go out and was hungry. I've always had a peculiarity for which was able to eat twice as much as the average male. But that was around my period so I dealt with it, even though I normally ate more than my faire share. Tonight I felt like two double cheeseburgers would hit the spot. But as I went out the door, the phone rang and it was Anton. He wanted to get together for diner. He suggested the deli down the street and he said he could be there in a half and hour. So I hung-up and shut the door.

I met him at the corner deli that was open all night. He was dressed in almost the same outfit that he had on the other day. The same worn jeans and another T-shirt, but even as he reclined in a booth in the back, he looked comfortable in the plastic booths that made you slid on no matter what you did to stay upright. I moved into the seat across from him and waited a moment before I met his eyes.

What did I say to him? He had kissed me and there was some strange animal magnetism that I felt around him. Even now, I felt the panic rising in my heart as it did the other day at the coffee shop. Something in me whispered that we were one in the same, that maybe he could answer the age old question of my past. Maybe we were somehow. I closed my eyes and swallowed forcing back the urge that I had to run from him and from everything that he could unlock. I forced back the heat in me. I would not let it overtake me this time.

“I'm surprised that you called me. I wasn't sure that you would.”

“I wasn’t sure that I would either. But the other day you said that you would tell me some things. You said that we were the same. I want to know what you mean by that.”

He just smiled as the waitress came over to the table. He ordered another coffee and three cheeseburgers. I followed suite and ordered two and a piece of chocolate cake. Hell, why not be myself around him. We waited until the waitress left and then he touched my hand lightly. A sudden charge ran through me and I heard whispers in my mind like static, but I couldn’t make out the voices.

“Do you remember your birth parents at all? Do you know where they came from, or any of your relatives?”

“No, I was just given up, my mother found me on the doorstep of the hospital when she was going in for her shift. She took me in and got custody of me. I know nothing about my real parents’ except that my mother was probably young or unwed and that was why she couldn’t keep me, or I was born out of wedlock.”

“Lara, have you ever stood under the moon and felt a pull toward it? Have you ever found yourself outside in the woods and wanted to leap for joy?”

I just shook my head. “I don’t know.”

“You’ve dreamed about the woods. There’s a pain that settles above your heart when you’re stressed. The walls of your apartment are confining, when all you want to do is roam free.”

“Yeah, that’s called anxiety. I’ve had that since I was a child.”

Anton sighed. “Oh yeah, then how does any normal woman eat two large cheese burgers and a slice of chocolate cake.”

“Big appetite and a fast metabolism.”

“You have an answer for everything don’t you.”

“You have no idea. Look, stop beating around the bush. I heard your voice in my head. I know you’re different. I know I’m different. I don’t know how I know that, but I do. Now what the hell does that mean? Why do I sit here and feel that you and I are equals when I’ve never felt that way with one, not even my parents.”

“That’s because we’re a breed apart from all the others. The pull for the wood is more than just something you dream about. It’s an instinct to live free in the wild, to hunt and sniff the cool crisp air, and not live in the city that is caked in smog. We long to live within a pack and be with others that are like us. And there are so few like us that are born. Most of us are bitten. We yearn for four legs and not two. Once we embrace the power that we were born with, the better we come to understand ourselves and the beast that lives within.”

I laughed. This guy was completely whacko and no matter how much I felt an attraction to him there was no way I was going to stick around and listen to him spout off. So he had rescued me from myself, but that was it. After eating, we were through.

“You don’t believe me, that is evident. But let me show you.”

He glanced around the restaurant and then held out his hand. For a moment, I thought it was a trick of the flickering light above us, but I watched as his fingernails sharpened and his fingers grew longer and slender. I glanced at his face and saw it touch his eyes had changed from green to silver and his face appeared to be pointer.

“What the hell are you?”

“I am what you are, Lara. A wolf wearing human clothing that is not lost among the sheep like you.” His smile widened and I saw a hint of four sharp canine teeth.

I stared at him as I watched his hand and face return to normal. He wasn't making this up and I suddenly felt like I had the lead in a horror movie. “You're a werewolf?”

He nodded.

“And you think I'm one too?”

Anton nodded again.

“What makes you so sure that we're the same? There's no way that I'm a whatever. Now you'll be telling me that vampires and trolls exist too.”

“Actually trolls have been extinct for quite some time and we have very little to do with the bloodsuckers. They multiply like rats and are always fighting over territory. We are much more civilized.”

“You really want me to believe that I am like you—some monster that goes around eating little children?”

“You aren't a monster and we don't eat children. They're too chewy.”

I stared at him in shock and then realized that he was joking and returned the smile as he broke out laughing. I was about to say something else, but the waitress arrived with our food. Without saying another word, I dug into my cheeseburgers and French fries. I noticed he did the same. For along while there was nothing more than the silence of us chewing and the clanging of pots and pans and other dishes, until finally the waitress cleared our food and only left the cake and brought us another pot of coffee that we could down again, whoever thought of the combination of grease and coffee, but they went well together.

“Say I do believe what you said and I am some kind of supernatural creature. Where does that include you? You said yourself that you have to be bitten to become one and I’ve never been bitten by anything more than a spider.”

“No, you didn’t hear me. I said that was the most common way to be a wolf. Most of those that are wolves come to the pack that way. But there are a few that are born into it, and ever fewer still that actually have the ability to change. It comes in families, but sometimes skips a generation or two. Those children that are born that remain human are still protected by the pack and are valued because they are not exactly human, not even the hybrids. Even those are valued, and a wolf born of two wolves is something even more precious. In the old days, there was a lot of inbreeding, but now many of the families have been mixed with humanity over the generations. You and I are pure blooded wolves. That is the why you noticed me when I came into the coffee shop right away. There was an instant attraction because you are pure wolf underneath the human skin.”

I just stared at him and everything that he said rang a cord in me. I knew that he was telling me the truth. It made sense. So that meant that my parents were werewolves. Ok it was a little far fetched to swallow if I had been normal, but everything about my life had a little bit abnormal so I could understand it. So that meant I was a blue-blooded wolf or whatever. And I should be running around naked under the full moon on all fours or something, but that had never happened, or maybe it had happened and I never remembered it. But I had never black out for that long periods of time so that only meant that my panic attacks were actually my body wanting to change. It would make sense. If there was some part of me that was trapped then I wanted to get it out, then maybe I

could feel whole and not like some outcaste that could win a hotdog eating contest with no problem.

“Anton. Everything that you’ve said would sound like a great tale if you were talking to someone other than me, but somehow it makes sense. I’m not sure why. Maybe I am trying to fill in the spaces of my life and make things fit. But so the dumb question if I’m a wolf, then I’ve spent the last twenty-eight years of my life living like a normal human and I have no idea what it’s like to be anything else. So how do I change and get to do that neat trick that you just did.”

Anton smiled and showed me his white teeth. They were perfect and straight I wondered if he ever had braces, but if he was like me, then maybe sickness had never touched him. My looks were a little better than average and I had great tits. I could have been a model if I wanted with high cheek bones and great doe looking eyes, but my figure wasn’t the right type, besides with my mother being a nurse she was happy that she never had to stay home much with me. I never even had a case of the chicken pox’s.

“We’re nothing like the legends, Lara. We can change when we wish. True, we have to change when the moon is full, but we can fight it and win. It is all a matter of will power and it takes a lot. Staying human and avoiding the sweet song of the night is one thing that distinguishes the power lines among us. I am the Alpha in the pack and can stay human when the moon is pregnant. But it comes with time and once you turn for the first time it gets easier and changes take place within your body you would never expect.” I can show you. I would like to be with you when you first change. We age slower than normal humans, much slower. But you have to change first and I’m not sure how it would be like for you since you have never done it. Painful I can only imagine. I’m not sure if

you can since you've been raised among humanity. Your will is very strong if you have never run on all fours. But if you trust me enough I can help you through it and from there you can make whatever decisions that you want."

The waitress brought our check over and before I could say anything Anton took it and paid the bill. I speared the rest of my chocolate cake to my fork and liked the remains from the utensil. It was strong chocolate, just the way that I liked it. Could I trust this man that I didn't know? He had brought and stayed with me at the hospital when he didn't have to. And besides that part of me recognized him, I knew that the only thing that I could do was trust him so that if I wanted to really explore the trapped part of myself that I had to trust him. There was no other choice.

"I think I can trust you. So when do we begin?"

He nodded and stole a pen from the waitress had given him and wrote down an address on the back of a napkin. "Meet me here next weekend. It would be better if you could get a few extra days off say like Monday and Friday so make it a better experience. But if you can't I understand. Call me if you do or if you change your mind. The ball is in your court, Lara. You can continue to live your life in a human cage or you can explore the other side of reality."

He said nothing else as I stared down at the address and knew that it was about two hours outside of the city, somewhere in the countryside. I glanced up at him as he left and just gave him a half heart smile. His face remained impassive as he walked out the door and crossed the street disappearing into the crowd.

The next Thursday I packed my bag and loaded into my car. It had taken some finagling, but I had gotten the week off and told my boss that I had a family emergency and left it at that. But after being there for four years and not taking more than a day here and there, I was entitled and I didn't care what my boss said. He was as cut throat as any other lawyer that worked at the firm. Ahh corporate bullshit. As I climbed into the car ,I had left Anton a message earlier that I would be coming up late. So I got in the car and began the drive, letting my eyes adjust to the dark. It was a nice night. The moon was just about full and had not yet rose to its zenith in the sky. It was a warm evening and the further I got away from the city the more stars began to poke out from the blanket of sky. I contemplated everything that had been said between me and Anton and over the past week and more dreams about running wild and free. I was less jumpy at work and something inside of me seemed to be more awake and I noticed I was hungry more than I had been before.

But as I drove with the wind on my face, I could see myself running free among the woods with other wolves. I wondered what they would be like as Anton had talked about a pack. Would they accept me? Would they look like me? Were my parents from them? Did they know anything about my heritage? All the questions that I had always wanted to ask ran through my mind, maybe they knew why I had been given up.

Finally, I got to the address and found a rusted mailbox and a long dirt road. I pulled into the dirt road which was out in the middle of nowhere and went down about a two miles before I saw a large old farm house that was in immaculate shape. There was even a barn in the back and several small buildings that could have been shed or guesthouses. I wouldn't have suspected something from the look of the mailbox and that

was probably the whole idea. I pulled into a small dirt area and shut the car off and as soon as I stepped outside the atmosphere seemed to come alive for me. Everything was crisp and clear around me and even suddenly I had a sense of self that I never had before, like I was one with the environment. I went to go up to the house when I heard cracking twigs in the back ground. Peaking my curiosity, I decided to follow as I saw something blur by.

I moved into the woods glad that I had worn sneakers and jeans and a long sleeve sweatshirt as the night was growing chilly. I followed the sounds of breaking leaves and twigs until I came to a clearing where I smelled smoke and an outcrop of rocks from where I saw a wolf on the top that overlooked the bonfire. I watched as the wolf took in the sight and then disappeared. And then in its stead stood Anton with his long brown hair wearing nothing more than a white robe that was sleeveless and hug to the ground. Then, before I knew it, I had been thrown and landed on the other side of the rock. When I looked up I saw a naked woman crouching over at me, sniffing me. Her long hair covered her breasts and was the only thing that clothed her. She growled at me and that attracted the attention of Anton.

“Look what I caught?”

“Leave her be, Serena.”

“Oh, is this the new bitch that you have claimed for the pack.”

I glanced up at Anton and saw the look of confusion on his face. Serena licked my face and then moved out of the way once Anton growled at me. He offered me his hand and helped me up. Serena sauntered over to the bonfire where I noticed there where six other women all wearing white gowns with nothing on underneath them. And one of

them was very pregnant. It seemed she was being held up by two of the others, as it was too much of an effort for her to walk.

The one called Serena walked around the pregnant one that was young and seemed scared out of her mind. “And will you claim this bastard as one of our own. Trina left the pack and came back knocked up. Will you claim the child once it is born?”

“Trina may have left the pack, but she has returned to us. All children born within the pack are welcome, you know this. If it grows and becomes one of the pack then it shall be welcome in the hunt, if it does not it shall still be able to claim our protection.”

“Anton, what is going on?”

“Lara, you shouldn’t have come here so early. You’re not ready to be here. You should go back before it is too late. Before the moon calls us and we will not be able to resist its call. Once that happens you will only be prey to the others and I will not be able to stop them from the blood-call. You should leave before the moon is high. Go now and I will come to you later.”

“Anton, you’re the one who called me here.”

Anton put his hands on my shoulders and stared in my eyes. “I know, but we will talk about it later. Now go please.”

The yearning in his voice was genuine so without another beat I moved off of the road and began running through the woods as all of sudden everything seemed heightened and the blood in my body began to boil. I could smell all the scents of the forest to the wood burning in the fire, to the fear that was rising from the pregnant girl. I turned toward the horizon and saw that the moon was rising. Serena was looking at me like I was dinner and I knew that I had to move. Without thinking, I bolted into the woods

the way that I came heading back toward to my car. I ran and hopped over fallen branches and after few moments heard running behind me. I glanced behind me and only saw blurs that were moving through the trees and I tripped sending my keys flying from my hands. It took me a moment to find them clamoring in the grass, and when I did I booked it again and didn't care about the pain that I felt in my ankle. I made it back to my car sensing whoever was following me was coming closer. I jumbled with the keys in the lock and finally as I got into my car something landed on the hood. I flipped my lights on and I saw Serena grinning down at me. There was nothing human in her face. Her smile was intense and her teeth were four sharp points and her eyes were evergreen and glowing. Her face was pressed against the window and her hand held her up. Her mouth spread into an inhuman smile even wider than it should have been. We stared eye to eye and she was going to kill me. There was no doubting that. She dared me to start the car and run away. Part of my brain knew that I should and another part that was more prevalent was telling me I should run with her and prove my dominance. Her smile widened and her hand drove into my hood, through the thin metal and pulled out some vital part of my engine.

I swallowed as the fear rose in my throat.

“I'll give you a head start little pup. I'll be good and count to fifty. One, two, three...”

I didn't want around to hear anymore and she threw the cables away and I bolted from the car and heard her counting in the distance. Fear was pushing me forward. I ran blindly up the steps of the house and pulled open the screen door grateful that it wasn't locked. I bolted up the stairs and into someone's bedroom. I hunkered down on the floor

on the other side of the bed, pressed up against the wall wondering what the fuck had just happened. Something was going terrible wrong. This was not how I pictured coming here. I thought I would be welcomed with open arms. I thought there would be others like me that would help me and make me understand what I truly was. I wasn't counting on encountering a crazed bunch of maniacs that wanted my blood. I swallowed hard as I heard the door slam shut. My heart pounded harder and my breathing became labored. I felt that unusual pain begin around my heart. My breathing increased. The blackness of another attack loomed to take me, but this time I knew that if it did that bitch of whatever the fuck she was, was going to eat me whole.

I swallowed back the fear a little and examined the pain. A voice whispered in the back of my mind to ride the wave of the pain and not be afraid. In that, I could find what had been truly trapped. I shut my eyes and quickly took off my shoes as quietly as I could. The pain grew from my heart shooting throughout my entire body. It was worse than having a panic attack. It consumed me, worse than anything I had ever experienced, almost like getting burned alive. And then I felt something that wasn't normal. I tried not to make a sound. When I licked my lips, I had four pointed teeth that shouldn't have been there. I opened my eyes and the half moons of my fingers grew. The whites of my fingernails curled and turned black. I looked behind me and saw my feet elongating. The fabric of my socks ripped and I heard my spine cracking as my vertebra moved and the muscles realigned. My face pushed forward and the back of my head pushed outward as I felt my ears lifting and moving sideways. A ripple of pain moved through me and I heard all of my clothing split and the stairs creaking. That bitch was coming. Hair pushed out from places that I never knew there should have been hair. And I felt something heavy

resting between my legs and realized that it was a tail. I swung my head around as I felt the difference in the weight and in my body as the last of the pain left me. The transformation was complete and I stood on all fours.

I didn't have time to get orient myself to my new body. Everything was different from where I had been; my line of sight, my sense of smell, my hearing was enhanced, everything about me was different and now that I heard the door open even more and the soft padding of claws on wood. I crouched low as Serena was expecting to find a human woman. I heard a low growl and then nothing else as I was knocked on my side and suddenly sharp teeth were locked around my throat. I kicked the best I could and snapped and wiggled out from under the other wolf's grasp as her teeth hadn't really pierced my skin. I quickly got up and leaped over the bed, heading for the door, somehow knowing that I could be safer outside. I made it down the steps and crashed through the screen door and skidded onto the ground scraping my nose. I didn't think of what else to do but let my feet take me where my instincts said that it would be safe.

Four feet carried me over rocks and trees and underbrush where two legs had been clumsy, four was quicker. I followed my nose and came back to the clearing where I found Anton and the others still gathered around the fire, waiting. Anton glanced up as I crashed into the clearing Trina was screaming as the baby was coming. I stopped, sides heaving and took a moment before Serena came out from behind me and I hadn't even heard her I had been so focused on getting away. Anton looked on the both of us as the others circled around us and Serena growled a challenge at me.

I had no idea what to do, but I growled back and without thinking leaped toward her. She moved out of the way and looked at me with a grin ,her tongue hanging out. She

had expected it. She hunkered down low and then pounced and knocked me on my side again. This time I was quick to recover and as she circled around I dashed at her and hit her. I jumped on top of her and we rolled, our jaws snapping at one another as she used her paw to keep me away from her muzzle. As we kept switching positions, we finally came to a stop both of us scratched and bleeding and I locked my jaws around her throat and tugging pulling out a piece of skin, tasting blood and flesh. Something in me was discussed at what I had done, but it wasn't that bad. The rest of the pack gathered around us as Anton patted me on the head and Serena's body shifted back to human form. Trina screamed again and my first won victory was short lived as Anton moved back to her and I moved with him also.

Trina screamed again and then there as silence and the smell of fresh blood. One of the others took the baby and handed it to Anton. He glanced down at it and then at me.

“Welcome to the Pack.”

Prayers

God, do you hear my prayers?

The sky rumbled its answer with earth-black clouds tumbling against one another. Within the cracks, I glimpsed the dark feathers of your angels, begging me to repent my sins. But how can it be a sin when blood is my existence?

Here I am, caught between paradise and hell.

The devil whispers sweetly in my ear to fall completely. *Feel the desires of your nature. Give yourself over to the inevitable. Feel the warmth in my arms to fire your cold heart.*

How can I be damned if prayers still linger on my tongue, if my devotion for you is part of my very being? Can I be in torment when the choirs of your servants fill my ears and bring me even the slightest of hope that you will forgive me my trespasses and allow me to rejoin the fold? The scents of your house are laden with frankincense and lilies, but all I can smell is the sulfur of the underworld.

I kneel, hands clasped. Hope brims in my eyes, but never touches my lips. You son gave his life to wipe away all evil that tainted mortality. Am I still considered one of his sheep? Did he die for me, even though I have survived longer than most? Will his blood wash away the stain on my soul like water does to innocent faces?

The candles that illuminate the sanctuary only throw shadows. I see the demons waiting for them to extinguish. Twisted features that mirror the desires that live inside of me. Blood drives my existence and sweetens my lips like the sacrificial wine. This is my body. This is my blood. The words move through my mind and they do not sting.

Icons of faith hide in corners each with chaste expressions painted on their porcelain faces. My heart lifts when I see them, but what can I do? Clawed fingers pull on my feet, dragging me down while my soul begs to be on high.

God, do you hear my prayers?

My existence is doomed to fog and shadows, somewhere in between the gray where the sun can never touch. The only existence I remember is this nightmarish one. The devil has my ear, and no halo will ever crown my head. Maybe the thorns of Christ are better suited me.

Your holy servant smiles at me. My lips turn up in response. His face is childlike as I move into the darkness with him. He murmurs his prayers and waits to hear my confession. The cool shadows caress my soul as I utter my transgressions. His silence is like the echo in my heart. No answer comes from your heavenly servants or your divine influence. The tugging of Lucifer gets harder to resist and my hunger is wanton.

Physical becomes mist, moving through pinpoints where repentance is uttered. Mist becomes physical again and your servant sees the devil. I am not the fallen prince, but something in between. Can you save my soul? I wonder.

He, like the others, does nothing but pray to you. Begging for his life, when it's his soul that is most precious. I smile sadly and taste him on my tongue. Blood is thicker than wine. Ecstasy brings me as close to you as I can come. But then, as always, I fall. And you are not the one who is there to catch me. But every time I pray.

God, do you hear my prayers?

Reflections

I inhaled the cigarette letting the drag settle on my lungs. Slowly, I let the smoke out watching as the vapor mixed with my breath. Gazing around the darkened street, I flicked the butt away and zipped my jacket closer to my face. Blowing in my hands, I tried to warm my digits as the temperature was falling fast and my ride still hadn't come.

Fuck, I thought. *Five more minutes, after that his ass is fucked.* I had been waiting in the doorway of Millicent's apartment for over an hour for my no-good-boyfriend to pick me up.

Bastian was five years older than me. I'd met him in college one night while I was out with a study group drinking and arguing over some bullshit literature class that I was only taking as an elective anyway. I needed to fill the space in my schedule and let *daddy* know I was serious about school. Shit, my father didn't give two shits about me. He just provided the tuition check to make sure his little girl was getting an upscale education. He barely knew I was alive. Business was his life and whenever I needed him for anything it was 'how much honey' or 'go see the nanny, daddy's busy right now'.

I hit my hand against the stone doorway of my friend's apartment building, wishing I had grown up poor. At least then, I would have had someone to pay attention to me besides a fat checkbook and nannies that locked me in the closet so they wouldn't have to deal with me. Or the teachers that thought I was the cute porcelain doll that was good to fuck. My father never knew about the abuse, I was in the care of others. Who would believe me when I was such a bratty kid? Sneaking out, being arrested, trying my hand at drugs, and even breaking into a few cars with my lowlife boyfriends. My father washed his hands of me in high school and got remarried to a *Barbie* princess who was only just legal. Now, he had a more perfect family that sent me a check once a month and a pretty Christmas card along with a fruit basket.

I sparked another smoke and slung my backpack over my shoulder. Fuck Bastian. I'd had enough of him anyway. Good-for-nothing-sorry-son-of-a-bitch. He was worthless and didn't know what to do with his dick. I didn't know what I saw in him. Maybe it was the whole little boy lost thing I was attracted to. He did look good in leather, but looks weren't everything. Besides, things were starting to look up for me. I had a gallery opening in a week thanks to Millicent. We had been going over the layout and the exact prints I wanted displayed. It just sucked he lived in a shotty part of town where the busses never ran on schedule. Whatever! It was all the queen could afford. I had met him while I did my stint at the local strip joint. He was the only one sober at the end of the night. He stopped one of his friends pawing at me all night. We hit it off and he gave me a ride home and we'd been friends ever since. He was slightly eccentric, but hell, so was I.

I pulled one more tug on the butt, snuffed it under foot, and began hoofing it to the nearest bus stop. It was past one a.m., but I could get something home even if it ended up being some smug-fucking-dick cab driver who would charge me double or expect a blow job for payment because I lived on the other side of the freaking city. It wasn't my fault that Bastian was a dumb-ass.

Sighing, I made it four blocks before a car pulled up beside me.

"Hey, sweet thing. Why don't you hop in and we can have a wild ride?"

I glanced over at the gangsta-wanna-be who thought I was some mamacita he could just pay to fuck. "Get lost asshole. I'm not for sale."

The dick revved his engine and began to follow along side of me wishing his rotting car was some pimp mobile. It was a far cry and the inside smelled like pot and corn chips.

"Come on lady, you know you want it." He gestured to himself.

I took one look at his stained white T-shirt, greasy hair, and blue jeans and laughed.

“Look, ass, Back off. All right.” I picked up my pace and heard the guy screech to a halt and his car door slam. Shit! I began running. Before I realized it, I tasted dirt and gravel. The asshole had me pinned as I struggled underneath him. I tried getting away, clawing my way along the cracks, getting crud caked underneath my fingernails.

Suddenly his weight was gone and I heard a muffled scuffle.

“Shit Man. I meant nothin’. I just wanted a little piece.”

“The lady said no. Or didn’t you hear her.”

“Yeah, yeah, man, whatever. You can have the bitch.”

The sound of sneakers hitting ground and the engine gunning jarred me to reality. I caught my breath and rubbed my throat. I got up slowly, wondering what the hell kinda turn my life had taken now. All I needed to top my night off was that asshole trying to rape me and then this guy thinking that he was going to get some too. All that I fucking needed, besides freezing my ass off because that asshole that jumped me had torn my sweatshirt. Besides that, I smelled like cheap beer and pot. Fuck Bastian for not showing up.

“That asshole is dead next time I see him. His forgetful ass is out of the apartment. He’s done mooching off me and the next time I see him he’s getting a fucking ear full,” I muttered.

“Excuse me. Are you all right?”

I got up, brushed myself off, and finally looked at my savior. His hair was cropped short almost Roman military style. The horrible neon blue light that illuminated the street reflected off his hair making it appear white-blonde. A leather jacket covered a dark shirt. Broken in blue jeans with holes wearing in the knees encased his well-muscled legs. He

was built, reminding me of one of my professors, as he was definitely older than me. That was all I needed, another father figure who thought they could fuck me, literally.

“Fine thanks.”

I turned and began to walk away like a good little city girl knowing that my sense of safety was slightly shaken, but that would be ratified as I had to survive. Anyone that lived in a metropolis knew that shit happened. I wasn't going crying back to Daddy's, his flawless wife would love to have the black sheep influencing her precious baby boy.

“Are you sure he didn't hurt you?”

I turned. “Look. Thanx for getting that asshole off me, but I'm fine okay.”

“As you wish. I'm Ethan.”

“Christa.”

He smiled and I found myself smiling back with my bad mood sliding away. He nodded and my spirit lifted. I hoisted my backpack again and hoofed it home knowing that Bastian would be out on his ass.

“Christa, hurry your ass up girl. We're gonna be late.”

I checked myself in the mirror adjusting the fucking dress. God, I hated being a chick. Millicent thought a dark rose color would bring out my green eyes and dark hair. I wasn't too happy about the plunging neckline and the slit. I felt like a high-class hooker.

“Yeah, coming.” I dabbed at my lipstick and let my hair fall naturally, realizing I looked like my mother when she had been my age. It was a shame I didn't remember her after she died of cancer. My father had thrown himself into his work and forgot about me. I was too much the reminder of what his life had been like when he was happy. Now he had his trophy wife and could remake the tragedy that his life had been. What-the-fuck-ever.

“Shit girl, you’ll drop’ em dead.” I glanced at the drag queen’s reflection and admitted he made a better chick than me. His mocha skin glistened from the body glitter and his red nails gleamed against the white pants suite and long blond wig.

“Fine, let’s go.

Twenty minutes later, we were at the gallery. I glanced around the white walls marveling that I had a show. After three years, it was true. Millie had become my manager and hooked up with the gallery owner that I hadn’t met yet. With the crowd that Millie knew, my friends, the flyers that I had put up around the college, and the neighborhood that I lived in, and by using Bastian this place was packed. All the walls were filled with my photographs. Rumor had it, this was the newest exclusive place in town that everyone wanted to get into. By the end of the night, I was exhausted from flirting, schmoozing and talking. I never did like being the debutant type and playing the friendly chick was not something I was good at. I was better at brooding and being behind the camera lens. Every time I looked for Millie, she was pawing over some cute boy and by closing my feet hurt. I was better in combat boots and felt like Alice that had recently gone down a rabbit hole with all the champagne that was floating around and the high-end crowd that had shown up from the ad that Millie had placed in the local arts newspaper.

Finally, the night was over. I was able to pull my shoes off and slid down the wall, not caring what I looked like. I put my head back and closed my eyes wishing for the headache that I was getting to go away. I was talking to the sea of faces and names that were smiling, all that wanted me for business. Which hell was great! All of them complimented my work. I had made a shit load of money from selling all except one portrait.

I opened my eyes and walked over to the photograph. It was one of my favorites. All you saw was half of my face reflected in the mirror, my arms covered my tits, as well

as my nude back and ass with the tattooed wings that I had for years. It was black and white and it reminded me of something out of a gothic novel. The look on my face was forlorn. I didn't remember what I had been thinking, but that time in my life I had no one to turn to. My father had just remarried and I wanted warm arms to surround me.

"The model is beautiful."

I turned from the photo to find the same guy, Ethan, that had rescued me the other night. "Thanks."

He smiled. I glimpsed something in his eyes that was almost like longing as he took in the photo.

"Ethan, right? I think that the gallery is closed for the night. If you're interested in my work, maybe we can set up a meeting or something."

He smiled smugly. I noticed that his hair was more silver than blond and he had paler skin than I thought. He was wearing dark slacks and a red silk shirt. His eyes were glacier blue. I found myself thinking thoughts of taking this guy out back and fucking him on the floor. Blood rose in my cheeks as I thought about him on top of me, my fingers running over his smooth chest.

"Hey, Ethan. How's it going sweetie?" Millicent purred behind me, bringing me out of my lustful thoughts.

"Hello, Millicent. The show seems to have been a complete success. The only print that didn't go was this lovely one, but I think the artist is more beautiful in person."

"Didn't I tell you, girl. She didn't believe me. You're gonna be a star all the business you got tonight. Thanx for letting is use the space, Ethan. You're the hottest thing in town right now."

"It's not a problem. I was in-between shows and you've done me plenty of favors in the past. It was the least I could do. I was hoping that I could buy this copy for myself. If that is okay?"

Millicent cracked a smile and I only stared at the two of them. “Back it up a sec. You own this place?”

Ethan nodded.

“Hey, look I’m sorry about the other night. It was late and I just wanted to get home. Thanx again for getting that dick head off of me.”

“It wasn’t a problem. I’m always glad to help a woman in need.”

“You guys know each other?” Millicent asked.

“We met the other night when she was in need of assistance.”

“Shit, girlfriend why didn’t you tell me you knew Ethan.”

“Millicent, I really don’t know him. He saved me after this gansta wannbe-asshole jumped me.”

“My, my, a match made in heaven,” Millie purred.

“Shut up, bitch.” I growled.

“Mmm-hmm.”

Ethan smiled at the exchange as Millicent put her hand on her hip, giving me her best drag pose she could muster.

“Look thanks for the gallery and all. You have no idea how much I appreciate it. You can have the picture for everything you’ve done.”

“You’re gift is well received. Thank you. Now, ladies, I think we should call it a night.”

Millicent just tugged my wrist toward the door. Once inside her car, she just started laughing.

“What is so fuckin’ funny?”

“You two that’s what. Shit girl. I ain’t ever seen Ethan wanting to get into your pants so bad. I’ve known him to be hot and heavy, but he’s got it bad for you.” Her nails

curled around her leopard print steering wheel cover. She began to sing softly to the tune on the radio.

“How long have you known him? And I don’t want to get into his pants.”

“I met Ethan long before I became this beautiful beauty you know today. I didn’t realize he was in town until I ran into him at the club a few months ago. We caught up over drinks. He said he was moving his space from Seattle to here and I knew you’d be perfect.”

“So is he my type or yours?”

“Shit honey, that boy loves pussy. As much as I’d love to get my hands on his ass there ain’t no way. I’ve tried, but he loves tits too much. Besides, I tried putting the bite on him and well—never mind. That is a story for a late night and a shit load of champagne. Now you have a good night and call me when you recover from all the dollar signs I see in your eyes or is that stars from your knight in shining armor.”

I didn’t say anything as I slammed the door and the queen drove off. I shook my head as I thought about Ethan. He was cute even though he was older, but he certainly wasn’t anything like my professor. He was fine and I could think of dozens of fantasies with us intertwined, his hands sliding over me.

“So, bitch, what was the occasion? You get laid by that faggot friend of yours?”

Bastian leaned against the door, smelling like a brewery. I’d thrown him out a week ago and left his shit out on the curb. It had rained and most of his clothes had gotten ruined. It wasn’t my fault he was late picking them up.

“Bastian, I don’t need your shit. I’m tired and it’s none of your damn-fucking business where I’ve been.”

I shoved him out of the way and struggled with the keys when I felt myself pushed out of the way. I landed hard against the doorway. I regained my footing and looked at Bastian who had a blank expression on his face. I screamed and kicked him in

the balls so he stumbled and hit his head on the brick wall. It took a moment, but I got the key into the lock and shut the door, walking up to my apartment where I examined my new shiner.

Finally, at three in the morning, after six aspirins, I fell into bed. It wasn't until I heard a knock I opened my eyes and instantly shut them as the black eye Bastian gave me welled to life. I wished I hadn't woken up, but the banging was insistent. So, I hauled my ass out of bed and wrapped my robe around me. When I opened the door, I realized it was dark out and I had slept the day away, missing my class and Ethan was standing outside.

"Hey, what's up?"

"It seems you need my help more than you need anything else. Can I come in?"

I moved aside and let him in. Ethan moved into my kitchen, got a frozen bag of peas, and poured me a glass of wine I had setting out from the day before. I sat on the couch and he put the ice on my eye and sat next to me. The peas were fucking cold, but they did make my eye feel better.

"So what happened? You have a run in with a door knob?"

Swigging the wine, I took a sip and realized I was hungry. I'd been too nervous to eat before the opening. "No, the doorknob would never have been that bad. My ex was drunk and decided to pay me a visit last night. He's pissed I threw him out. He was supposed to pick me up the night you got that asshole off me."

"It seems like you need more saving. Let's see."

He removed the peas and traced a finger over my face. His touch was tender and as I stared into his blue eyes, I felt the same attraction that I had for him the other night. Without thinking, I leaned in and kissed him. His lips were warm and after a moment of hesitation, he returned the kiss with some force as his hand found its way under my robe. Ethan cupped my breast, running his hand across my nipple. He kissed

me harder as my hands wrapped around his neck, but he pulled himself away, breathless.

“I’m sorry. We shouldn’t—I don’t want to hurt you.”

Ethan got up and stood with his back to me.

“Why would you hurt me?” There didn’t seem to be a harmful bone in his body. He was breathing hard and I went around to face him. His skin had bleached out more and his eyes were fire-blue. When he glanced up at me, I held in a scream.

“Oh god, what the fuck are you?”

“Do I frighten you? Or will you still have me? I am just the same as I was. I know your loneliness, Christa. What is in your picture is reflected in my soul. I felt it that night when you were walking home. I know your pain, how alone you feel.”

I stared at him transfixed. He wasn’t lying. I knew that just by looking into his eyes. My fear of him dissipated. My whole life I’d been alone. No one wanted me. “I’m not afraid of you.” I said as I took his face in my hands.

His teeth were sharp. As he smiled at me, a shiver of fear ran through me, but it didn’t touch my eyes. I kissed him slowly, exploring the teeth to his amazement. He thought that I would run in horror. There was no reason too. My soul knew that he wouldn’t hurt me. Ethan took me in my arms again and crushed me against him hungrily. Until I pulled away, breathless.

“I’m not afraid of you, just a little surprised. My life hasn’t been a walk on the normal side. I never thought about the supernatural, but what the fuck? I can deal. So before we go any further, why did you come over here anyway?”

He just chuckled. “You forgot your shoes last night. I got your address from Millicent.”

“That is a real lame ass excuse for wanting to see me again.” I smiled.

“Yeah, well, a guy has to think of something.”

“You really a vampire or is the right term sunlight challenged, or some other politically correct bullshit.”

“No, I’m a vampire. Have been for five hundred years.”

“Hmm, well I guess you’ve done this a lot, returning women’s shoes, seducing them with frozen peas and warm ass disgusting wine.”

He smiled as his hands slid over my silk robe feeling my body underneath.

“By the way. Where are my shoes?”

“I guess I forgot them.”

“Lame, Ethan, real lame.”

He just kissed me and I melted.

Several hours after I had dozed, the phone woke me out of my blissful slumber. My eye hurt like hell, but my body felt good. Ethan knew how to use his hands. We spent hours exploring each other and then he bit me. It felt better than the sex and I flew into orgasm as long as he sucked on me. Honestly, it didn’t faze me that he was a vampire. I never really thought about it, but hell whatever. There were stranger things on the planet. He should have met some of my ex-boyfriends. I thought they were a little out of it, but that was my destructive faze when I got my tattoo and had my tongue, lip, nipples, and clit pierced all over night that included a bottle of Absolute and a shitty date. All the piercings I had taken out except my clit. It just made sex so much more fun. My body missed Ethan’s touch and he promised he would come back later that night. He told me the sun caused him some problems, but nothing like the movies. He just had to get some sleep. Finally, I picked up the phone.

“So chickie, how was your night?” Millicent voice blared on the other end.

“Damn girl, you were right. He does have a nice ass.”

Millie laughed. “I heard you discovered some of his other qualities as well.”

"I don't know what you're talking about, bitch." I grumbled wondering how much my friend really knew about Ethan.

"Oh come on, girl. I know he leaves quite a hickie."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mill."

"Oh cut the shit, Christa. I know about Ethan's peculiar eating habits and his nocturnal ones. Who do you think introduced him to the night life?"

There was silence on my end as what she said sunk in. "Wait a minute you're a fucking vampire and you never told me? Bitch, you got a lot of explaining to do."

"Shit girl, I would have. You don't think I'd let my sista rot do you? I just never got around to it. But you got Ethan now baby. Enjoy the ride, it'll be fun. Eternity can show you lots of secrets. Don't worry about that asshole Bastian. He sucks a mean dick and made for a great snack. You aren't mad are you?"

I just smiled. "No girl. That asshole deserved it." I just shook my head. Honestly, it didn't faze me that Bastian was dead. It should have, but it was water under the bridge or maybe I had a predisposition for the vampire condition. It just pissed me off more that my best friend hadn't told me his deepest, darkest secret after all the long nights we had shared crying over shitty ass Bette Midler flicks. "Damn, I can't believe you didn't tell me. I just thought your eccentricities were all part of your queenie lifestyle."

"Ha, yeah that's what they all think. Now you'll have to tell me the details later. A girl has to get her beauty rest."

"Yeah. Whatever. Night, bitch." I hung up the phone and just shook my head, not surprised that Millicent was just more than a queen. It figured. It fucking figured.

Ruins of Memory

My eyes open expecting you to be there. You were always there when I awoke. Your touch greeted me into the night, soft as a feather. Hot, misty nights we spent together, walking among the mortals as they thought us one of them. Listening to the mixture of jazz and blues mingling among the cobblestoned streets where the jasmine and spice clung to our skins as we drank from our prey.

The night was our cloak, the mist our shroud and blanket. We shared the tombs of aging dead as the sun road the sky and humans knew not what lay behind sun-baked granite slabs.

We supped on the city for years, watched as races mixed their spice into the native blood, Spanish, French, black, white, creating the perfect vintage that flavored generations. Ghosts and shadows strolled along with us in the pre-dawn hours, keeping our secrets.

Finally, humankind caught up with itself. Younger versions of ourselves came to our hunting grounds along with mortals who thought themselves like us. The games they played; they didn't know any better, pretending with plastic fangs, and eyes that glittered from artificial lenses. What would they know of true immortals?

We had fun enticing them, even nurturing a few that was worthy of the darkness. But then danger prickled along my spine and I told you of the coming disaster. For the first time you called me foolish, giving into human notions. But I ignored your comments and took our belongings to other sanctuaries.

Your blood stuck in my throat as I left. The whisper of your thoughts moving away from mine left me breathless, with a lingering mortal feeling of remorse and dread. I waited moonrise and fall and yet you never came. I waited another swollen heart beat and then moved to look for you.

Form mixed with mist and fog and I raced along with the birds, moving south until salt mixed with the breeze. The thing I saw stopped my heart.

Our hunting ground was no more. The moss covered trees, with cicadas chirping to the night kind, were stripped. Gone were the cobblestones where my feet knew every groove. No more jazz, no more blues. Everything was gone.

In place was water, brackish, brown, debris filled. Fire lit the night sky along with the cries of mortal despair. Our once cherished resting places were gone, the ancient and recent dead floated like lost logs. The stench curled my sensitive nose, as for miles there was nothing more than water and rooftops peeking out like seedlings. Disaster. I had told you, but you wouldn't listen,

Somewhere you were trapped, buried beneath feet of water with other things lying on your coffin. A place too deep and dangerous for me to go. I lingered for hours watching the waters rise. Engulfing everything I knew and loved.

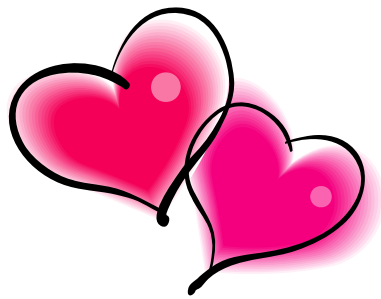
No more shadows, no more secrets to share with the ghosts. No more sweet lullabies of enticing music. No more humid nights of hunting humans hand in hand among the cobblestoned streets and alleys.

Even in mist form a single tear slipped into the water. The night was ebbing and your call fading. I had warned you, you hadn't believed me. I did all I could. Everything was sacrificed back to Nature. Sleep called. One more glance at the devastation. Nothing would be the same.

The sun peeked over the horizon, I lifted off, racing to beat the dawn, and as I did, for the first time in centuries, I lifted my voice to the heavens and prayed.



Erotica



Cravings and Punishments

The air was thick with humidity, clinging to her exposed skin. Sweat glistened on her tits as she lay tangled in the sheets. Her nipples were pert as the silver rings waited to be played with. Her hands were tied to the bed posts above her. Her wrists were bound in fur lined cuffs so there would be no marking on her, but he had left her feet unfettered. Tristan had come to her last night, reminding her that she was his possession and no one else's after she had strayed from him. It had been weeks since she had been graced with his presence and she had begun to wonder if he had found another paramour.

This was part of her sentence. He had been gentle with her last night, riding her lightly, never letting her fully come. Locking her in restraints and running a feather across her flat stomach until her back arched and she cried out for him to either stop or fuck her. He hadn't given her the satisfaction of either and had kept on running the tip of the peacock feather between her breast, over her stomach, moving it along her neck and even touching the end of it to her clit. Her cries had filled the room that night for hours and he was relentless, using his teeth and his fingers to punish her because she had sought solace in the arms of another man.

The heat from the day had seeped into the room as he had left the windows open and she always hated the heat. Allise wondered why her parents moved to the south. Allise liked the cold and the snow as her air conditioning was always cranked to maximum and she rarely went out while the sun was up. She had mentioned this to Tristan when she first met him and they were getting aquatinted. Now, this was part of his punishment that she would have to sweat all day, yearning for his touch, unable to quench her own desires.

Allise moaned silently as she wanted to be fucked. Tristan's cock was just the thing that she needed to ease her desires. She prayed that he would come soon as the breeze moving the curtains was cooling signaling that night was falling and he would be rising soon. Her body had become a canvas that showed off all his works, all the places he had bitten her, sliced her, whipped her, and pierced her. And when he didn't come to her after two months, she assumed that she too used for him. So she sought out the company of another. No one in particular, just a man that she met at a bar.

Their night had been heated, tame to what she was used to. He loved her tattoos, the nipple and clit piercings. He had bitten, sucked, and played with them, wrapping his tongue around the tiny barbell until she told him to shove his dick in her. They had fucked three times that night and only once did she have a true orgasm and that was when he was slamming into her after she begged him and told him that she liked it rough, rougher than what he was used to. That was the problem with southern boys. They treated women like glass and she was so much harder to break. That was another reason she hated the south so much. Now there was only one thing that was holding her here.

“And how is my pet tonight?”

Allise glanced over to the window. Tristan stood in the shadows. She could already tell that he had something planned as she saw another in the darkness with him. It was not the first time he had brought others to play. She had never minded, normally it was another woman that Tristan would fuck first and then he would watch as Allise had her clit licked and suckled. Grinding her hips against the other chick all the while her eyes were locked on Tristan's and he watched, half amused. It was only when he would come behind her, grab her hair violently and run his tongue from her earlobe to her

throat, bite into her that he would truly come, spurting against her back as he drank her blood. But she had come to expect that. It was the kind of creature that he was.

She had never been truly afraid of him. He was a vampire. No big deal. He fucked her, tattooed her with his own markings. One was a serpent that had its fangs sunk in her left ass cheek and its body was coiled around the top of her thigh. A Celtic cross adorned the side of her neck with the same serpent woven among the arms. A dagger stabbed her leg with a serpent on the blade. Each was intricate in its detail and had taken hours, but each time Tristan had taken loving care of her. He had pierced her as well. Before he did her clit, he had worked her into a frenzy with his tongue and fingers. Then he had bitten her, taking control of her mind for a fragile second. The pain seemed an illusion at first, but then he let all sensation return to her. As the pain hit her, she came and begged him for more. The shock on his face was timeless and in response he brought the whip to her back and marked her until the tails of it were stained red and he was licking her back, healing the wounds. She was panting from the pain, high on it, as it moved from there to her swollen clit and worked her again until she couldn't take it anymore. From there, he had only gotten worse. That night was a night she would never forget and his punishment of her had been relentless, but she had loved every minute of it. Allise could only wonder now what he had in store for her.

Tristan stepped out of the shadows. His blond hair was pulled into a ponytail that hung to his ass. At certain times he was delicate and let her brush it for him. That was only when he seemed to be in a lazy mood. He was dressed in leather pants that looked like a second skin. She licked her lips, thirsty for him rather than water. His skin was tan, but that was fake. He had been enthralled with salons that spayed on color to make him

appear more human. His eyes were vivid blue. There was a scar that ran through his right nipple and down to his groin. He never told her how he had gotten it, but the serpent armband was the only other thing that adorned his body. The rest of it was perfect. Her hands ached to run over his body, her tongue playing with his cock as he supped from her veins.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” she whispered.

Tristan only half smiled as he knelt on the bed and brought a glass of water over to her lips. She drank deeply and then jumped as he ran a line of the cold liquid over her stomach. He moved her dark hair away from her face and licked the side of her throat, catching it with one of his sharp teeth. She moaned as her eyes rolled in the back of her head as he sucked on her for a moment. Blood smeared his lips when he pulled away.

“You’ve been a bad little pet. Thinking I would leave you all alone. After all I have invested in you, Allise, you should know better.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“Come out, Antonio.”

Allise’s eyes locked on the figure who emerged from the darkness. He was almost as tall as Tristan with dark hair and cruel dark eyes. His mouth was set in a perpetual sneer. He was naked and already hard. Something about him, the way the air separated around him, made her realize that he was like Tristan. She had never seen another creature like her master and she wondered what he was going to do to her. The new vampire only smiled showing her long, thin fangs.

“You have already branded her.”

“Yes, Master.”

“You wish her to be your first.”

Tristan bowed his head. “Yes.”

Allise looked at the two creatures wondering what Antonio meant. She had never seen Tristan so submissive or that he would call another master.

“You said you found her with a human male. And this was how you chastised her. Come Tristan, you have grown soft. I am disappointed with you. Let me show how it is done.”

Allise’s eyes met her lover’s and he looked away. With a flick of Antonio’s hand, she was free and on her feet. He snapped his fingers and suddenly a rope appeared with a large hook on the end dangling from the ceiling. He hoisted Allise up so she was suspended by her handcuffs. Her feet were on the floor. He spread her legs until the muscles cried out and then he fettered her ankles. She was eye level with the new vampire. Something about him made her muscles ripple in fear.

Pain exploded across her face as her head was jerked to the side violently. Allise tasted blood on the side of her mouth. His tongue was like sandpaper as he caught the trickle. Her cheek throbbed as he grabbed a handful of her ass and brought her hips forward some so her clit rubbed along the tip of his dick. It hit the metal barbell and she bit her lip to keep from crying out. Her eyes stayed locked to his as something was inserted deep within her. It was cold, like ice and studded so it scraped along the sensitive walls of her cunt. He pumped it slow at first and then faster. Even though it froze her insides, she was getting hot. More blood welled in her mouth as she bit her tongue to keep from moaning. Her hips were bucking forward. Orgasmic highs overtook her brain

and she was lost to it. The cold phallus moved faster inside her, and suddenly there was a crack and pain across her back. Another crack as the tongue of the whip split her flesh.

With that she couldn't hold it in any longer. She writhed from the pain and the orgasm from the phallus and she realized that it was Tristan holding the whip and Antonio's own anatomy that was fucking her. Her eyes closed as the vampire's hands closed on her ass, separating her ass hole with his fingers using her own juices as lubrication. Two fingers became four as he opened her. This kind of intrusion was new. Tristan never took her ass. It was the one thing she had always been wary to try and in that he had been respectful. But now as Antonio's fingers violated her, she found that she wanted more as the whip kept marking her back.

Finally, she cried out and knew that this was punishment because it went on for hours with Antonio and his fingers were replaced with Tristan's dick. Once he shoved all the way inside of her, Antonio smiled and fucked her harder, matching his rhythm with Tristan. There were locked supporting her weight between the two supernatural beings. Her lover's hands kept her nipples pinched between his thumbs and forefingers as Antonio's tongue played lightly over her throat.

"Please, Tristan," she begged, after it was all getting too much. Antonio's dick had rubbed her raw hours ago and she was bleeding, she could feel it as he had already pumped his cum into her many times over. She was also bleeding from Tristan. She knew this was the punishment they had talked about because she could never get enough of them. She always thought that she could handle her lover, but with two vampires, she didn't know the pure pleasure, passion, and punishment that went along with them as

they were insatiable. This was something she would crave forever, as they remade her body by fucking her.

Her lover said nothing to her except plunged his fangs deep within her throat squeezing her pert and bruised nipples harder like they would burst. Allise cried out. Locked between the two beings she wondered what her outcome would be. Fear still laced her from Antonio and with that thought he met her eyes and took the other side of her throat still, fucking her as he pressed Tristan even closer. God, she wanted to touch them, to have her fingers free to run over a hardened chest, for her mouth to seek lips and a tongue to explore, but she wasn't being allowed that. As Antonio struck, her heart struggled to keep up with the hectic pace that they were both setting as they were going to come a final time as they drank her in.

Allise's eyes fluttered open. Thirst struck her immediately. That and cold, everything was so cold. Her body felt dead. She sensed someone next to her and she smelled Tristan and rich earth. Suddenly, she felt his weight shift and his mouth was kissing the side of her throat. She turned over and looked into his eyes and for the first time saw feeling there. It twisted her heart as she realized that he had really loved her even though she had always thought he saw her as some possession.

“Hello,” he whispered, “how are you feeling?”

Allise licked her lips and realized something was off. Her teeth felt heavier and sharper. “I don't know. What happened?”

Tristan smiled and then kissed her using, his tongue to open her mouth and caress her fangs. His hand moved between her legs and found her clit. He worked her clit slowly

in circles and moved two fingers inside of her. But even as he worked her and tried to get her hot, nothing moved her. Allise's body responded as it had used too and she started bucking, writhing against him as it took awhile for the heat in her to ignite. Once it did, her mouth moved against his and she moaned while his fangs grazed her shoulder and he replaced his fingers with his cock. Suddenly her fangs found his neck as he pumped into her. His blood moved into her throat. She shuddered to even more unbelievable peak than she had hit last night. Her hips gyrated faster on Tristan and for the first time she had no trouble keeping his marathon pace. Once the blood hit the roof of her mouth, she knew that this was what she had been craving. Tristan's nails dug furrows in her back and she registered the dull pain realizing that there were going to be many nights ahead of her, of punishments. With that she smiled, lifting her head from her lover's throat and met his lips. With a snap of her fingers she found a whip there. The smile became cruel and Tristan laughed as she flicked the tail over his chest.

Dare Her Now!

The murmurs of sweet nothings were monotonous as Rochel flipped over on her side, trying to purge the memory of Clay from her system and her body. The space next to her felt empty like an echo that never bounced back. His words filtered in her thoughts as he promised there had been nothing between him and Saddle. She was used to being betrayed, but not by her best friend and her husband. Now, months later, her house mirrored her bed and her heart. The red digits on the clock strained by as the minutes passed slower than dust settling. She groaned and stared at her window. The night was cold, everything seemed distant. The city was so far off when it was only a few miles in her car to uptown. The stars were barely bright anymore, but that was because of all the human inhabitants that burned their lights from office buildings reaching like fingers brushing the night sky.

She sighed again and wrapped her arms around herself, trying to image his touch sliding over her skin. She had met Clay in a bar. He was actually the blind date that Saddle had been set up on, but her friend had never showed and they had hit it off. After three years of marriage, they had been happy and then she had come home. She heard Saddle's twittering laughter floating through as she dropped her purse and her jacket on the sofa. Walking into the bedroom, she discovered her best friend's legs up in the air and her husband grunting like a pig. Rochel didn't say anything, but turned on her heel and headed to a hotel room. She was a zombie for a couple of days and then finally contacted a lawyer and filed for divorce. Clay begged her to come back to him, but she ignored his pleas and six months later she was a free woman. Now, she was alone in her house getting alimony and was unhappy as ever, wondering if she should have accepted her

husband fucking her girlfriend just so she could have the perfect marriage that everyone thought they had.

Who was she kidding? She couldn't have shared her husband with anyone. She had done the right thing, even though everyone was telling her to give it a second chance.

“God, why does it have to be so hard?”

“It's only hard if you want it to be.”

Rochel turned, startled by the disembodied voice. “Who's there?” Her eyes searched the shadows and she could find nothing, not even the outline of a stranger waiting in the night to rape her.

The voice laughed. It was a rich laugh that she could have been caressed by. “I am not here to harm you, Rochel. Only to try and take away some of your pain, if you'll let me.”

Her eyes strained in the thick fabric of her room. Suddenly, a pair of eyes appeared sitting in the chair in the corner. They were electric blue like neon signs in the distance. Her breath caught in her throat as a shiver trembled down her back raising the hair on her body. From the eyes, a form took shape in the darkness, a thick line marking the body of a man. A second passed and the stranger stood up slowly and Rochel heard the rustle of cloth as he walked. She moved back closer to the wall, hoping that the curtain could shield her from the intruder. He sensed her fear and froze.

“What are you?”

“Something that can take away the hurt that you feel. I can give you surrender and abandon, something that you will never know in the hands of any mortal.”

Rochel twirled a stray hair that fell from her ponytail. This specter was not moving. He waited for her to make the decision. Something that Clay had never done. He had always wanted things his way, always wanted to be on top, always wanted to hit orgasm, leaving her wanting and never sated. She sneered at the thought of the life that Saddle and he were making for one another. Her friend was going to find out really fast how much her new hubby liked to be on top. Her curiosity was piqued. Why would this being come to her? What could he do to her? Was he a demon come to possess her? An incubus come to draw the life out of her?

“Can I touch you, Rochel?”

She looked into his eyes and they held her enthralled, but he wasn't trying to take advantage of her. She nodded. In an instant he was behind her. She didn't feel the heat of his body nor was he cold. It was as if there was no one there. His hands rested on her shoulder and she felt the weight of them through the T-shirt she wore. The intruder's chin rested on her head. She had forgotten what it was like just to be held, to have someone there that she could rely on, to know that she wasn't spending the night alone.

“Tell me what you want?” he breathed against her hair.

Fantasies slid through her mind like dark chocolate and she didn't know where to start. She wished she had strawberries and she could dip them into the fantasies of her mind.

He laughed against her. “Everything you want I can give you. You don't have to think of one thing. Or I can give you an experience like you have never known only if you let me.”

He slid one hand along the nape of her neck touching the exposed flesh in a butterfly caress. Soft fingers moved over her throat and tingled her cheek. Rochel almost melted into him there, but she bit her lip and just let him move over her jaw. His other hand slipped over the thin cotton and moved lightly over her breast feeling the nipple hardening at the thought of what he would do to her. His lips met her ear lobe and nibbled like he would on an exotic sweet.

Her breath drew into between her lips. His hand settled on her stomach resting lightly and her heart fluttered to a stop. His lips moved from her ear to the side of her throat where his tongue traced the line of her artery. For a moment, it lingered and she wondered if he was some kind of vampire that would plunge his fangs in and drink her dry. At her thought, his teeth nipped her skin and the pain was intense.

Her moan made him pull away. “I told you. I can be whatever you want. I can have fangs and drink you dry. I can make you an immortal seductress if that is what you wish. Do you want that?”

“I don’t know what I want. Except that I want this, whatever it means.”

“Good. Then relax and let me bring you what you want. Everything I do will be something that you have always wanted. I swear.”

The palm resting on her stomach slid over the thin material of her panties. She jumped from the sudden contact. It had been ages since someone had been so gentle with her and so demanding as well. He was taking charge, but only in a manner that was her choosing. His fingers toyed with the elastic sending shivers through her core. God she wanted him. It didn’t matter what he was, she wanted him. Fuck Clay and Sddie.

Rochel turned in his grasp and looked at the creature that visited her. He had hair the color of dark earth and skin that was tan. His hair was short and he was wearing nothing. He was sculpted and had no belly button, but as she allowed her hand to travel down she felt his erect cock and it was warm like he was truly human. She watched his expression as he smiled and closed his eyes while she caressed his length. She slid down and took him in her mouth. She loved to do this, but Clay never let her. He always wanted straight sex, never went down on her, never let her roll her tongue around on his dick like she was doing now. She cupped her hands under his balls to hold him steady as her other hand slid around the perfect mound of his ass.

“Yes, Rochel, yes.”

She wanted to bite and went down on him harder, taking all of him in her mouth thankful that she didn't have a gag reflex. He tasted salty with a hint of spice like musk, but what did a ghost taste like, what flavor was mist and shadow. His hips thrust against her and his hand settled on the back of her neck nestling her into him. He thrust against her faster as her tongue worked up and down his cock. Breaths came out of him quicker and he was panting. Suddenly he burst down her throat hot and salty. She swallowed him down like he was nothing and looked up at him as she licked the tip of his dick and sat on her bed, feeling rather guilty. He sat next to her and stoked her hair.

His fingers wound around the strands as if they were made of silk. She relaxed against him and let her head fall back onto his shoulder. “What are you really?”

“I'm spun from dreams and fantasies. Reality bends to my will. I can create or destroy. I am nothing and everything. And I've been watching your dreams and heard

you call out. I heard you long before this night, but it was your soul longing that made me flesh.”

“You’re a demon?”

“No.” He kissed the top of her head and lifted her chin caressing her lips with his. His technique was exquisite not too much tongue and just enough. Her fingers pressed against the hollows of his cheeks and she fell into his embrace as his fingers traced her shoulder blades. Lifting her T-shirt, his hands moved over the outside of her tits. Quivers ran through her and she moaned as she automatically raised her hands above her head and let him fling the shirt into the shadows. He backed away and stared at her.

“You are so beautiful, Rochel. You don’t even know it. There is so much that you could do. All you have to do is let go.”

His hands caressed her tits feeling the weight of them, bringing one to his lips. His tongue flicked over her nipple and the other was being pressed by his fingers. He locked his eyes with hers and smiled. Her mystery lover trailed his tongue down over her tummy and he settled his face into her cunt. His tongue found her clit through her panties and a sudden moan escaped her lips. Suddenly, there was nothing separating her from him as he made them disappear. His tongue worked over her quickly as his fingers plunged into her depths.

Rochel bit her lips to keep from crying out more from the tremors that moved through her. Colors appeared behind her eyes and pleasure exploded in her brain. Her hands clenched and her nails dug into his shoulders as he worked her. Her knees grew weak and could barely take the pressure building inside of her. She was panting as his

tongue and teeth lapped against her, pushing her over the edge, until her juices exploded in his face. Her head fell back as the after affects shook her.

He met her eyes again and kissed her lips so she tasted herself on him. God, where had he been all these years? Was he always lurking in the shadows waiting for her?

“Yes. Your secrets built me and your thoughts gave me substance. Do you want forever, to be as you are?”

“Yes, if it means this. Fuck me. Kill me. I don’t care. I just want this.” She begged him, surprised to hear herself uttering the words.

“Good.”

His fingers buried inside her turned ice cold and thickened, stretching her cunt until it hurt. A hint of fear dotted her eyes as a maniacal smile spread on his face. His eyes faded from blue into black. He moved his fingers inside of her up and down, finger fucking her. Pain sliced her as he kissed her. His mouth became a maw of sharp teeth and they fastened on her throat in a fluid motion. But she didn’t feel that pain. She was already lost in the way that he was fucking her, pushing inside of her harder then she had ever been fucked. Her legs wrapped around his back and as her toes caressed his ass, she realized that there was no longer skin, but something sharp like scales and an appendage curled around her other leg, a tail.

“Harder. Fuck me. Harder.”

“Do you still want this?”

“Yes.”

“You are nothing. You are shadow and form, thought and fantasy. You are everything and reality.” He chanted.

He pulled his fingers out and with one motion slid his dick into her, wrapping his taloned hands around her. With his cold cock buried deep inside her, Rochel felt the warmth leaving her as she panted. Her breath quieted, but the pain that the demon gave her was exquisite, and as the muscles in her cunt contracted bringing her over the edge, she felt herself shifting, dissolving into something, into nothing. But even as he fucked her into oblivion she knew that Clay was on her list. Oh, he would experience what she had to offer. When that happened there would be nothing left to him. After him, there was Saddle to contend with. Dare her best friend cross her now!

The Fifth Stroke of Midnight

Strike

With the thwack, Collette jumped in her velvet restraints as the tip of the whip grazed her right shoulder leaving its faint sting. A black satin mask was the only article of clothing she wore. The cool air caressed her nakedness raising the fine hairs along her nubile flesh. Everything about her was alert, waiting for the Mistress to punish her for all her bad behavior. And she had been wicked.

Roxanne examined Collette's body with experienced eyes, watching for the subtle beating of the heart to increase, for the skin to take on the first blush of unfilled pleasure from only the sound of the whip. Her slave was beginning to tremble in the velvet fetters, from fear, from the anticipation of what she was going to do to her. Was she going to be merciful and punish her captive with only the sound of the crop? Or zebra stripes showing the others how insubordinate she'd been? Roxanne draped the bullwhip around her shoulders, running her hand slowly up and down the leather handle. Her eyes drank in every curve of the supple flesh before her. The alabaster-smooth texture of the flesh was virgin pure except for the long scar that ran from her right shoulder, down the arc of her spine, and onto her left ass cheek. The mark was old, white and raised. Roxanne had first run her fingers over the imperfection, knowing it was the mark of one master. One that had been hers eons ago. Everything laid on Collette hadn't fazed her until she brought out the bullwhip. It was the first time she'd seen Collette tremble with expectation. Her nipples pink and hard.

Now her hand wandered over the whip's hard shaft as she flicked the other end like an impatient cat's tail. The tip hit her thigh-high latex boots. She could brand her

poppit with a sister trophy, but Roxanne didn't want to break the girl just yet. She desired Collette begging, crying out for the whip to never stop licking her skin. The sharp pain would penetrate the flesh, zinging to all the pleasure centers of the body. Even Roxanne's tits wanted the leather to fondle them as she strained in her latex corset. A bead of sweat formed on her upper lip. Her tongue caressed it slowly and she shifted her weight as her sex moistened at the thought of the bullwhip. But she mustn't get too carried away; she was the Mistress now, no longer the slave to her own whims.

Roxanne tested the whip's weight finding the right grip on the handle.

Strike.

She snapped the empty air. Collette jumped and moaned at the sudden sound. Roxanne saw the insubordination and grabbed the puppet's mahogany hair and wrenched her head back.

"Is that what you want, my lustful bitch? Do you want its searing hand on your flesh? Or do you want it in your cunt? Tell me or you get nothing."

"The pain, please," her slave moaned.

Roxanne smiled and released Collette, running the whip under her nose. The perfume of leather and oil mingled as the smoothness ran over her lips, and she remembered the first time the whip nicked her; the first time her master let her handle the implement. Oh, so many wonderful memories. Many times had she been under the wanton ecstasy of the leather, had the aroma of the oil on her skin, and like her petite slave, she had her own trophy, a twin to the mark on her own back, given to her by the same master.

She let the whip trail between her fingers, letting her own memories slip away as the candles flickered.

Strike.

One flick and the tip licked her slave's skin. A drop of crimson appeared and a thin line dimpled across the small of Collette's backside. The quick bite sent spasms throughout the victim's body. Collette felt the warmth between her trembling thighs with her pussy growing wetter and wetter. She'd waited so long she would burst at one more painful lash. An eternal string of nights had passed her by without feeling the lick of the whip, the tempting pain that bought her to ecstasy in one, long, never ending strike.

As the leather formed like a second flesh and ripped open her body, too long had she been left without the bliss of the connection and then the sweet burst of air that left her breathless. Her body was slick with sweat. Her cunt was moist from its touch. Now as it connected again, she welcomed the pain. Her hands clenched and unclenched in the velvet restraints. Blood welled in her mouth as she tried to tame her swelling pleasure. Her legs wobbled as her muscles tensed from the orgasm about to rip through her body.

Strike.

An evil smiled caressed Roxanne's lips. Collette was coming, trying to hold back from the pleasure of the flogging. All her nerves were hot and alive. So close to midnight and with one more stroke she'd be hers. Crimson rivers meandered down the alabaster landscape as the wounds sealed and dried in seconds. It was what she loved about Collette's kind. They understood pain and pleasure. They knew how to embrace their bodies' biology and revel in punishment. The only drawback was she lost them to their animal selves once a month. But right before their change was when they were prime.

Just like Collette.

Strike.

The whip caressed her slave and her legs buckled. Moans escaped her lips even though she tried to suppress them, but it was too much. Collette's wanting crashed over her, consuming every thought. Body glistening with sweat, hair in her face, and the smell of her sex filled her nose. Another lash was all she wanted, was all she needed to be tamed.

"Please. Oh please," she whimpered.

Her mistress stared at the drying blood, capturing her insides. Her own need rose and caressed her. The whip slipped from her fingers. Roxanne wrapped her hand in Collette's hair and pulled her slave's neck back. One hand glided over sweat shimmering tits, kneading them while her tongue stroked her throat letting the beat of life intoxicate her more than any memory of lashings, of the fiery sweetness of the whip. Her hand found Collette's naked cunt. Her gloved hand slid into the depths as her poppit gasped at the cool latex, but Roxanne yanked her hair back hard building the pressure again for her captive to come. Lips parted reveling ivory fangs that separated flesh and gave her the elixir of life as her bitch moved against her, coming, changing.

The restraints ripped and the slave's moans became howls, but Roxanne held on as Collette's spine cracked and bowed. Blood ran hot in Roxanne's cold body, jump-starting her heart as she released the wolf that fell to fours.

Rubbing against Roxanne's thigh, Collette gazed up at her mistress with the whip in her teeth, careful not to bruise the leather. Roxanne wiped her glove across her mouth, getting rid of blood that stained her lips.

“Good bitch.” She patted the wolf’s head.

She ran her hand the length of the whip, feeling its warmth and the suppleness. Her grin widened and her teeth flashed in the candlelight.

A thunder crack split the silence and a howl pierced the night as a clock struck midnight.

Fuck Me. Please!

Exhaling, I stared at the smoke as it mixed with the cloud coming from the incense. French vanilla with a tad of lavender covered the scent of sex that lingered in the room. I groaned as Brian snorted through his nose in his sleep. He normally dropped unconscious after sex. I inhaled another drag of my cigarette and then snuffed it out, knowing that I had to quit, but I had been saying that for years. Still, I had cut down. Brian grunted again and I groaned as I got out of bed and threw my jeans back on, not wanting to deal with his noises. It was typical. I didn't know why I was with him. Sex wasn't anything to write home about. I did my best to fake it, but lately, even my phony oh baby, oh yeah, oh baby, was getting old. He had slammed away on me for years when all I wanted was for him to finish and roll off of me.

My keys were on the nightstand where I left them and so was my overnight bag, but I wasn't in the mood for sleep. I needed something more. A fucking orgasm was what I needed. Rocked to the core and my toes curling. I had no clue when the last time that was. The door locked automatically behind me and I walked the short distance to my car.

I stifled a yawn as I got in and put the keys in the ignition. Just as I did, something came across my throat, cold and sharp. My eyes darted to the rearview mirror and I saw nothing, but dark eyes staring back at me. The urge to scream died in my throat as fear paralyzed me. All the self defense tactics I learned drained from my thoughts and I just prayed.

“Get out of the car. Now!”

I nodded and opened the door slowly, leaving the keys in the ignition. Outside, I thought about running, but it was two in the morning and not a lot was open. The streetlight near my car was out, leaving me virtually in the shadows.

My attacker got out as well and stood in front of me. Suddenly, he grabbed me by the throat and dragged me around to the back of my car where it was even darker. He threw me against the trunk and the blade was around my throat again. My heart raced in my chest and I was having a hard time breathing. God, what was he going to do to me? My eyes darted to Brian's bedroom where the light was still on, but he was passed out for the night. The edge of the knife was cold and with one wrong move it would slit my throat. The mugger breathed warmly onto my ear and licked the back of my neck. His free hand moved over my T-shirt feeling that I wore no bra and my nipples were hard from the terror seizing my body. His foot kicked my legs apart and I whimpered in the night.

“Shut up.”

I bit my tongue as the weight of him pinned me down. The knife left my throat so his hands would be free. With a tug, he pulled up my shirt and his hands grabbed my breasts kneading them together, hard and quick, just the way I liked it too. He pinned the nipples and squeezed them harder leaving bruises. He was panting already and hard against my ass. I could feel him straining through my jeans. He kept moving my tits round and round squashing them together, measuring their fullness. There wasn't any urgency in his movements. No, he had been waiting in my car for hours and he was going to take his time with me.

Satisfied with my tits, he unbuttoned my jeans and pulled them down so they slid around my ankles.

“My, my. The little whore doesn’t even wear panties. I guess this is my lucky night.”

The trunk was digging into my ribcage and it was getting hard to breathe, but he separated my legs even more using his knee to do it. One hand moved over my shaved cunt and found my clit. He worked it for a few minutes and I couldn’t help but grind my hips against him. This guy had great control. I whimpered more, but it wasn’t in fear. I was inflamed.

“Tell me, slut. Do you like this?”

“Yes,” I whispered.

“Good.”

His other hand moved into me too quick that the pain from it was mind blowing and I cried out.

“Oh bitch. You are so ripe. I’ve wanted to fuck you for a while. I’ve been watching you. Your little lover boy does nothing for you. I’ve seen your dreams and desires. I know what you need. But you have to feel me first. Do you feel me?”

His fingers formed into a fist deep inside of me and my muscles weren’t used to the expansion. He moved inside of me quicker and quicker as I rode him. My muscles clenched around his fist until he pulled out of me, leaving me wanting. God, I wanted to see my attacker, to know who was doing this to me. God, I needed to know, but he wouldn’t let me up and it was too dark for me to see his reflection.

“Who-are-you?” I managed between pants.

“Everything you’ve desired. Shadows and dreams brought together from gossamer and mist. I was just looking for a way in, and tonight you’ve given me that. I just need one more thing from you.”

“What?”

“All in time. Now you feel my punishment.”

Before I could utter a word, the blade that had been near my throat was brought to the inner lips of my cunt. The coldness of it made me sigh and come immediately. The thumb on my clit worked me slowly and I climaxed again. My brain was flooded with so much adrenaline, I didn’t know if I could stay in this position any longer as my knees wanted to buckle. He kept working me, finger fucking me. The knife moved inside of me slowly, ever so slowly so he wouldn’t cut me. I could feel the warmth of the blood already sliding down my hips. The inner wounds stung. My warmth was working on the metal, heating it up, melting it. His fingers moved over my hard node and my heart raced in time with my orgasm that plagued me until finally I felt his tongue where the knife had been, lapping the blood away, still working me with his fingers. The texture of it was sandpaper like a cat’s and he licked all the blood along with my juices.

“Please. I can’t take it. Please.”

“Do you want me to fuck you? Is that it? Tell me what you want, my little whore.”

“Hard. Fuck me hard. Now.”

Suddenly the denim that separated us was no more and he granted my wish. A groan escaped my mouth and I melted on the hood as his length was worse than the knife. He seemed thicker than his fist, but that was impossible, but I didn’t care. He pounded

against my womb hurting me every time he withdrew, making his entry slick and lightning quick, doing exactly what I asked. His hands gripped my tits for leverage. His nails left crescent shape welts. He held on so tight, but the pain was exquisite and I wanted more of him. It didn't matter that my hips were banging into the trunk of my car and rocking it forward on its wheels. I was beyond comprehension as he banged me, raped me, and fucked me. Everything I had ever dreamed of. My mind was a canvas of white light going off as I tried to hold onto the slick paint. The metal was cool against my cheek giving me car burn as I moved against it so quick. His weight was on top of me and I loved it. Brian was never like this. This guy knew what I wanted. I was panting, groaning, screaming, I'm not sure what I was doing, except getting fucked and I wanted it to go on forever.

Height after height, this guy took me too and it didn't seem like he was coming to an end. My knees were beginning to buckle and my stamina was giving out as much as I knew that I didn't want it to. The orgasms were beginning to move into blissful pain. That added even more spice, but as I thought I couldn't take anymore a sharp pain caressed the side of my throat. I thought it was the blade at first, but his hands were still locked onto my tits. With the pain came something else, an even greater plateau that I hadn't reached in ages. The strongest orgasm I ever had overcame me and I felt like I had an amorism. My heart stopped in my chest and I realized his rhythm had slowed as he was sucking on my neck.

Finally, I collapsed on the hood feeling like mush. He stopped and stepped back and forcibly turned me around. I was able to look at the man who fucked me royally. I knew him. Didn't I? Something flashed in my mind. "Felix?"

He smiled, slightly panting. His dark hair was sweat plastered to his forehead.
“Vanessa. Do you remember me?”

I stared at him. There was blood on his mouth. Before I could register anything else, he scooped me up in his arms and kissed me letting me taste the blood. A moan moved between my lips and my tongue was lapping at my blood, tasting my juices intermixed with it. A ripping sensation moved from my gums and I felt my teeth lengthen. It all came back to me. The years that I had been away from the man that I loved. The drugs they gave me after I was captured. Brainwashing me into thinking I was human. Normal. Brian was my controller. He had just gotten sloppy. Kept everything vanilla, when I needed pain. But if I had too much pain and I saw blood then it might all come back to me.

“How did you find me?”

“I’ve been searching for ages. How do you feel?”

I realized that I wasn’t tired at all. I ran my hand over his hardened cock. “Like I could go another round or four. I haven’t been fucked in a long time. Not with you. I need it badly. I need it so bad.”

He moved my hand away. “I know baby. I know. But first.” He slit his wrist and the scent of his blood got my attention. I ripped into his flesh and drank in the liquid, clearing away the drugs that I’d been under for far too long. I’d wasted decades of my existence being a slave so they could discoverer the secrets of my “condition.”

I whimpered when he pried me off. But I saw his eyes dart to the window where a shadow moved across the shades. Brian was awake and realized that I was gone.

“You up for a little sport.”

I licked my lips and pressed myself into him. My lips met his and kissed him hard, my tongue darting between his lips feeling his teeth. The teeth that he had punished me with so many times before. He squeezed my ass and then zipped himself up. And moved into the shadows and I straightened my clothes and saw Brian emerge from the door. I faked tears and left myself a little disheveled.

“Van, what’s wrong. What happened?”

“Brian, I—someone in the car. Tried to rape me.”

I snuggled into him as he rested his hand on my hair. The scent of his blood was warm and I tried to play the nice human girl, but that wasn’t happening. I grabbed him through the hole in his boxers moving my hand along his length.

“Van, what are you doing?”

“Nothing dear,” I murmured.

I slid to my knees, keeping my gaze locked with him, feeling his mind popping open like a sardine can. I pulled out his cock and wrapped my tongue around it. He tasted good. He held in a moan as I ripped away his shorts, leaving him exposed to the elements. My teeth slid into place and the friction made him even harder that he spurted cum into my mouth. I swallowed and it gave me strength. My thoughts consumed his.

Tell me what you want.

“Suck it baby. God please, suck it.”

I smiled against the smooth feeling of it. I heard Felix behind me. My mouth took Brian to the end, taking all of him in. Felix went behind fingering Brian’s balls and then moved into his mind as well. I kissed my lover in the human's mind and felt the passion between them. Brian had fear and desire on the brain. I held my first captor ready to

come as Felix pushed into his ass, breaking the virgin territory as Brian bucked against me as I used his dick as a lollipop. The human was powerless as we both had him.

Together, Felix and I met inside his brain and we mentally fucked so that I was coming, my muscles clenching and unclenching ,that I could barely keep from writhing on the ground. I couldn't believe that I had missed this.

Felix moved against Brian's ass and kept his nipples tweaked like he had done with mine. I caressed his balls as they strained against me. Finally, the hunger for it all washed over me. I had learned all I needed from Brian, where their facility was, the drugs, if they had any others of my kind. I knew all his little secrets and I was going to use everyone one of them. My captor had outgrown his usefulness.

“What do you want, Brian? If you hadn't manipulated me, you might have gotten this every fucking night.”

“Fuck me. Please, fuck me,” he whispered to Felix. His pants and moans were turning me on. But his dick was hard and so full and it had been so long. I felt Felix caress Brian's neck through our mental bond and with one quick movement I bit down just as my lover did. All three of us came at the same time, and I swallowed cum and blood all at once. I drained him all and finally looked up as Felix let him drop.

I got up and licked the blood from his lips.

“Come on, baby. Dawn will be arriving soon and I promised her that she could see you before sunrise.”

“You're so naughty. I can't believe you still have her.”

“I turned her, love. You remember how sadistic she was. We've done things that I want to show you. If you hurry up, we can have the rest of the night to experiment. We

can go after the others later. I want to explore all of you. Besides, you've been a very bad vampire." He grabbed my hair and yanked my neck back and licked my throat. "You let a human fuck you. And I'm going to have to punish you over and over again."

"Please, please punish me. I've been so bad. Please." I moaned.

He smiled. "Your wish is my command."

With that he vanished into mist and joined the shadows. It took me a moment, but once I let go of my flesh, I melted as well having it come over me like a second skin. The darkness fit me as a glove and I was going to be fucked just like I needed to be.

Trophy

As his hand slid along her thigh, he smiled. A shiver of pleasure ran through him as he took in his subject's quiet beauty. She was so still. So very still that he could do anything that he wanted to her. Dark hair framed her head like a tarnished halo, but he knew there were horns underneath the beauty. Lips so pale that he wanted to kiss and breathe life back into her. But that would break the spell all too soon and he wanted to savor the simple beauty that she presented to him as she lay on the starched sheet. No wrinkles imprinted the bed, adding to her perfection. The whole room was perfect. White. Clean, with the hint of bleach under the cheap vanilla air freshener that he had picked up at the corner store.

He had spent hours scrubbing the tile floor until it was alabaster once again. Even the walls were freshly painted white. All for her. He had done everything for her. His fingers played with her erect nipple, fingering the small pebble, and still she didn't stir. Not even an eyelash was batted as he began having his way with her. He stared at his trophy committing every feature, every hint of her flesh to memory to make sure he wasn't dreaming. He had worked long and hard for her, for this one moment. Waiting. Studying. Watching her to make sure she was the right one. And she was. He had taken her unaware, while she was sleeping. He remembered it all too well. Just the thought of it got him excited and hard. Even reliving the memory joy coursed through him and he wanted to fuck her right there.

Sweat beaded on his forehead while the sun beat down on him as he stood on the fire escape peering through her window. He tried lifting it once before. It was nailed shut.

This time he was going to have to get to her the hard way. Her slumber put her in a coma so deep that nothing would rouse her. He had already witnessed that. Now, to be sure, he took one swing of the crowbar and let it smash through the glass. Broken shards littered the hardwood of her bedroom, reminding him of ice chips as they crunched under his shoes. Two steps in, he stopped and listened hard for any sign of his entrance to her lair. One heartbeat. Two. Three. His breath caught in his throat. His pulse pounded in his ears as he listened and his grip on the crowbar tightened just in case she sat up and noticed he was there. Maybe she was toying with him just like some of the others had been. His hand absently felt along the side of his cheek, running over the jagged scar that marred his once perfect face. Yes, that bitch had gotten what she had deserved in the end.

Fumbling in his bag, he took out the crude wooden cross that his grandfather had carved. The holy relic fit into his hand perfectly as he brandished it before him. Hunting their kind was in his blood. Passed down through four generations and he was the last of his line. Everything he knew was from his family history. His father had taught him how to recognize the beasts. The slight sheen to the skin under particular light, the lack of breath, or heartbeat. Sirens that lured men with a smile. Ever since he was a child his father had pointed out the difference in them. How they bred like sewer rats. Underneath their innocent exteriors, they were demons.

The one before this one had tricked him. Somehow she had drawn breath, had a heart beat. She had evolved beyond the others of her kind and seemed human. But that was impossible. Even the cross that he had pressed to her flesh hadn't left a mark. Still she had sliced at him with the knife and had caught his cheek leaving him with the awful scar. Yet, like all the others, when he plunged the knife into her chest and pieced her

heart, she had screamed and died. Her face had slipped into wonderful serenity and he had been left with a lovely trophy. Slowly he had used his scalpel to peel away the layers of her skin. Sections came off in thin strips revealing muscle underneath. Blood had splattered on her sheets exposing the red muscles underneath. Still, he had kept peeling away, stripping off her nose, slicing the thin skin of her eyelids and reconstructing it into a parody on the pillow beside her. The thin blade had severed her blue eyes and he had smiled as he held them in his hands, marveling at their beauty even in death. But his true reward had been the fangs he pulled from her upper jaw. They were small in comparison to the others that he had, but that was okay. They still had been good enough to add to his collection.

Now, as he stared at the creature on the bed, he knew she was the real thing. He could feel it. Brandishing the cross, he crept slowly toward her. A hint of sunlight streamed in. The disturbed curtains, he had moved through, blew in a breeze that parted them slightly. The ray warmed his back, but he was careful not to let it on her for fear that she would burst into flames. Then all his careful planning would be ruined. He put his bag down on the side of bed, noticing the alarm clock, a picture of her with her arms wrapped around another man, and the small gold cross beside the clock. The picture must have been a reminder to her of happier times. He smirked at the sunlight draped creature in the photo.

From his bag he took out a knife, the very one that had scarred him. Lovingly he let the cool metal run over his palm. He smiled. The blade was his tool that rid the world of the demons like the one before him. Slowly, he pulled back the sheet and took the blade to slice away her T-shirt. The monster looked so peaceful that he would never have

suspected, if he didn't know, that she was a creature of darkness. The knife made a good enough nick in the cloth that he was able to tear the rest of it with his bare hands as he dared put down the cross since she was not moving. The sight of her perfect, lithe body, sent shivers of lust through him. But he had to remember that he was not here to ravage the beast. He was here to dispose of it. It was his mission to cleanse the world of devils.

Hovering over her he took in her eternal beauty and watched as her chest remained still. He picked up his cross and placed it in the space between her tits. Watching, he waited for the skin to begin to smolder, scar and burn, but it did nothing. Suddenly she stirred and inhaled. Her chest shuddered and the cross fell to the wayside. His eyes widened in surprise. This one was like the other, a hybrid. Somehow the species had mutated and there was now a new kind of beast that lurked among the shadows. He wondered if next they would be able to withstand daylight as well. That would make it even harder for him and his fellow hunters to discern the beasts. What would his father say now?

In that moment, he was glad the old man was dead and scattered to ash. The poor man had been beaten at his own game and seduced by one of the beasts. He had been bitten and it wasn't until it was too late that he found his father and the whore together that he had to do them both. If not, his soul would have remained in hell forever. For his father the death had been swift and noble, a machete to the neck and his father's pain had been obliterated.

His knife almost slipped from his grasp as he froze and waited for the beast to open her eyes. Even with the shudder of her next breath, he held to true to his conviction. He would rid the world of her kind. His grip tightened on the blade turning his

knuckles white. He ran his tongue over his dry lips. Steady. One step forward. A loud creak sounded under the carpet as he stepped down. He inhaled through his nose. The light breeze hardened the beast's nipples. Another wave of lust nearly brought him to his knees as the beast's power worked on him in its slumber. The minute changed on her digital clock. Her chest shuddered again.

The beast's eyes snapped opened. She wasn't supposed to do that. Her eyes met his. A wave of surprise gripped him as hard as he held the knife. Realization. Fright. Shock. All played in her eyes before reflecting on her face. Her ruddy mouth formed an 'o' to scream.

In that split second, instinct took over. Everything he had been taught. All the years of his father's voice drilling into his psyche washed over him. The knife was his claw; his weapon to use against the demon bitch like the crusaders used their swords in the Holy Lands. Only when her kind had been wiped out would he truly know salvation. His grasp on the blade never faltered and before she could let a sound, the knife buried itself in her chest, piercing her heart. He withdrew the knife and watched the pool of blood forming in the hollow between her perfectly formed breasts. He waited a moment, but the beast didn't burn to ash. She must still have been young, too human to crack and ignite and crumble. The crimson pool trailed in a slight tear to her belly button. He wiped the blade on his dark pants so the stain was not visible.

Peace washed over him as he stared at this prize. Still she could come back and there was only one thing left to do. He reached back inside his bag and drew out the machete that had stolen his father's life. It was the sharpest of his weapons. He brought it down quick, severing the head of his newest victim finally, ridding the world of the

demon bitch that lay on the sheet. Hybrid or not, she was not going to rise the night and search for blood. Separating flesh and bone was easy and it only took one strike. Blood soaked the sheets under the beast and her eyes stared at him accusingly. But she was human now in her demeanor and he had saved her soul. In that he knew his own salvation was bought and paid for with each creature he slew. Still she was beautiful and he wanted to savor that beauty. Just like he did with all the others.

He had washed the last traces of blood from her body. The wound where he pierced her heart was clean, showing the incision. His finger traced over her cold flesh. The wound on her neck was clean as well. A small piece of her vertebra peeked out almost as if she was giving him a quick look at something intimate. At that, he felt himself growing hard and the lust he had experienced when she was in her death coma, laying on in her own bed was doubled with what he felt now. Squeezing his eyes shut, he forced himself not to come. He didn't want to unload in his pants like a giddy teenager, but that was how he felt.

He leaned over his trophy and inhaled her scent, marveling at the glow her skin was taking on as it started to gray. Her lips her purple and blue. The right color for kissing. Bending over her, he pressed his lips to the severed head working his tongue between her lips. While he did, he began undressing. Buttons slipped out of holes easily as his tongue grazed the beast's teeth. They were not as sharp as he thought they would have been, but now she was at peace so everything about her had reverted to human form. Next came his pants and socks until he was bare. His hands were buried in her dark hair. It still smelled like apples. He planted small kisses along the bridge of her nose. He was

careful with the severed head as he moved to her body and gripped her breasts with his large hands. They fit into his palms perfectly. God he wanted more of her.

His tongue traced the line of the cut, catching the edge of her spinal chord. Her face was still frozen in the scream. Her eyes still had the fear. She was locked in the perfect moment as she saw her own death in him. A creature that was eternal had died by his hand.

Her body was temperate beneath him, slowly loosing the heat she once had in life. The skin was clammy and he was warming her once again. But the one benefit that he discovered was that she was still so very wet allowing him to slid inside of her waiting cunt. A primal moan rumbled from his chest as she was a perfect fit for him. Somewhere in his mind, he wondered what she would have been like if she was still alive. Would she have welcomed him and enticed him like she had many others? Even if that had happened, and she had her way with him like any succubus, he would have offered her soul salvation. Her life would have been forfeit, as it already was, because her soul was damned the second she joined the legions of the devil.

He pumped inside of her. She was easy to spot under the lights of the seedy bar. God she felt so good. His palms rested on the sides of the body, leaving depressions in the white sheet. With each movement, the head turned on the pillow, slowly sliding down not looking at him. He gritted his teeth as he was coming. Pounding into the body, fucking the corpse and astonished at how supple the body was. Still so pliant.

Yes, the bitch was easy to spot. The sheen on her skin had been the most telling thing. It sparkled to his trained eye like glitter. Even now that sheen was still on her cold skin. It made up her very being. His fingers dug into the wrinkled sheet as perspiration

broke out on his skin. He gritted his teeth. The head was completely off the pillow and upside down. He closed his eyes and saw that fear in her eyes. How the muscles in her face bunched around her mouth as she had started to scream. It looked so good on her.

At the last second, as he came he grabbed her tits, holding onto them for his life. Collapsing on the body of the beast, he took a moment to rest. Everything in the room was silent. The scent of paint, bleach, and vanilla stung his nose. He bit his lip and felt movement underneath him. Suddenly, legs were wrapped around him. He tried to sit up but the arms of the beast held him fast.

Laughter filled the room. A giddy giggle that grated his teeth. He was able to lift his head and saw the beast's head staring at him. It had turned back around and was resting on the stump, watching him.

"You deserved it. You bitch," he muttered.

The head did nothing except stare at him and smirk.

"You liked it didn't you?" another voice whispered in his ear.

He looked to his left and saw another woman staring at him. She could have been the twin to the creature underneath him.

"It's really a shame," the woman said. She picked up the head and sniffed it, inhaling long as she ran her nose along the side of the severed head's cheek. She licked her lips absently rearranging the hair before meeting his gaze.

"What are you?" he asked as he tried to get up. His hands absently felt for his cross or knife. Anything that would make the shrew sorry of the intrusion into his world.

The creature saw this and picked up the crude cross. She pressed it to her ample tits, over her heart. "Oh, it burns. Someone help me. Please."

To his horror, she shattered the family relic to splinters as she closed her fingers around it.

“You should know what I am, Jethrow.”

Her hot breath whispered against his ear. Her hot flesh pressed against his back. A shudder moved through him and instantly he was hard again while he was still buried inside his trophy. He knew what the was beast was. “Let me go. You Spawn of Lucifer. Devil’s Whore.”

Hard nails racked his back. He winced as he tried to stop himself from quivering from her touch but his body was not responding to his commands while his brain knew he had been ambushed. The one he took as his trophy must have been the child and this one was Master.

“Your only half right. Jeffy-boy. Queen Bee, I am. But not to the one you so innocently slaughtered. All of them were blameless children. All human like you. What would your father say? Did he know your twisted fascination for fucking the dead?”

“How dare you speak about my father? You bitch. He would have taken your head. Lies. All lies.”

The beast nipped his neck and he felt the edge of her fangs while he felt her wet cunt on his ass cheeks.

“Baby. You’d be such a good fuck. I’ve been watching you. Stalking you like you stalk these helpless victims. At first it took me years to find you until I got your scent. You were sloppy with the last one you killed.”

“What do you want?”

“Like I said, you killed my children with a swipe of your machete. Your father was a good fuck and begged me for salvation after he saw the errors of his ways. He was better than you. At least he knew what to look for. And Christine was my baby sister.”

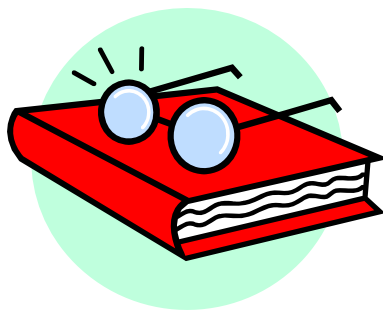
“You can take my flesh, but you can’t kill my spirit.”

“Baby. I don’t give a damn about your spirit. There is only one thing I want from you.”

With that, she brought down the blade. His head landed next to the trophy he coveted. She smiled to herself as her tongue licked the machete clean. Red had splattered everywhere on the perfect white surfaces, giving the room a little more color. The coppery flavor of the blood enhanced her senses as she dropped the weapon. Flipping the body over, she lowered herself onto the still hard dick of the corpse. Her hands caressed her tits as she rode her trophy. Moans escaped her lips. Jeffy-boy had been correct about one thing. She hadn’t had such a good fuck in a long time.

Dead was certainly better.

A Little Something Extra



Gods and Goblins, Oh My (Excerpt)

With a loud bang, Kalli opened her eyes and jerked out of bed. The clock showed she had been asleep for about six hours. The witch groaned, wondering if Ickleberry had finally returned to claim his week old Chinese Food. Throwing the covers back, she rolled out of bed seething. As she did, she didn't see the silver chain slip from her lap and settle under the bed. In the living room, she smelled something cooking. At first, the odor was that of apples, but she must have had it in her nose from the dream. Frustration rolled through her.

“Harry—Ickleberry—whatever your name is, I want you out! Consider this your eviction notice.” She got into the kitchen and instead of finding the troublesome goblin, she saw blonde hair, an iron skillet in one hand, and a pancake suspended in mid air.

“Lugh?”

He sensed her entrance and looked over. As he did, his concentration faltered and the pancake, poised over the skillet in mid air, fell onto his face and slid to the floor.

“Are you okay? Are you burned?” She quickly ran a cloth under cold water and began to wipe his face with it. He caught her wrist and moved her hand away. As he did, she saw that he was laughing. There was no mark like there should have been if he had been human. Instead, he traced the line of her jaw. Kalliope's heart sped up. She licked her lips as her mouth suddenly went dry. He eyes searched his face as he smiled and pulled her into him. Lugh's lips were soft like silk as he kissed her gently letting the tip of his tongue meet hers. He pulled away, leaving disappointment in her heart. Kalliope sighed loudly as he distanced himself from her. He tasted vaguely like apple himself.

“Kalli, I’m fine, but I think the flapjack is a total loss. I hope you can forgive me. I wanted to surprise you by bringing you breakfast in bed. Although it appears I am not good with the handiwork of mortals.”

Kalli burst out laughing as she looked at the mess of her kitchen. There was flour everywhere. Batter had spattered on every imaginable surface. The clean room that she had worked so hard for last night was completely in shambles again. The witch knew that if it were anyone else that had broken into her kitchen; she would have had a fit. Then she finally focused on Lugh now that her heart was not doing summersaults from seeing him and this welcome kiss. A flour smudge ran across his nose and stretched to his forehead. Her white and pink floral apron covered his waist. He was definitely excited to see her by the tent pole poking out from the apron. She had to bite her lip to keep from bursting into giggles as she thought of him trying to flip pancakes. The god put the skillet on the stove as Kalliope dropped the. His eyes took in her form. She reached out and entwined her fingers with his. A shiver ran through her that made her remember the first time that he had touched her. The same thing happened, but this time she wasn’t covered in mud and rain-drenched like a wet raccoon. Her heart quivered and whatever she was going to say died in her throat as calmness descended over her. The god smiled and his golden hair reminded her of an uneven halo. His free hand looped behind her back and cupped her rear, pulling her into him. His hard member poked her inner thigh. Her eyes never left his. Kalliope felt totally at ease in his embrace. She had been right, they were a perfect fit together. It seemed forever with them staring at one another. Finally, the god pulled her roughly into him. His lips met hers and she was lost to him. The tension drained from her toes and melted like the ice cream had done on her dream apple pie. Lugh smelled like

pine and woods, with the undertone of fresh air. Kalli's free hand twined in his hair as she kissed him harder. Lugh squeezed her but and Kalliope began to untie the strings her apron, but they wouldn't budge. His tongue early played with hers as his hands run up and down her leaning the curve of her back, but never going any further as if he was waiting for her permission. As the witch was kissing him, suddenly the aroma of apples brought her back to reality. Instantly that broke her mood enough that she pulled away.

“What's the matter?” The god asked breathlessly.

Kalliope only shook her head as she picked up the dropped cloth and began wiping at the flour and batter. She needed to catch her breath as her weak knees threatened to collapse out from Lugh's kisses. The witch noticed two chairs were pulled out at the table and there was an empty plate and an apple pie waiting patiently on the table. The pie had one perfectly cut triangle out of it. Kalli stopped wiping and her hands began shaking.

“Kalliope, what is it?” Lugh asked. His hands wrapped around her waist

“I thought I asked you not to call me that,” she whispered absently. Everything her aunt had told her was true. Her dream was not really a dream. Maybe she had slept walked and baked the pie. She had heard about people doing stuff like that. One of her friends in high school used to sleep walk and smoke. It was lucky she never burnt the house down.

“Kalli, what's troubling you? I thought you would be amused to see me. I can leave if that is what you wish. I had hoped that we could start where we left off before Ickleberry interrupted us.” He inhaled the scent of her hair as he kissed the soft spot under her ear. It sent shivers through her. Her nipples hardened as his palms caressed her

breasts. She stifled a moan as his manhood pressed hard against her rear. Even those slight sensations were driving her crazy.

“What do you want with me?” the witch asked. Her hands gripped the counter edge as she tried to rationalize what was happening to her. There was no rational explanation. Somehow, the supernatural had crossed over into the realm of non-fiction. According to her aunt, it had been influencing her since before she was born. She had been delivered in the arms of a goddess, been granted protection. What had killed her parents? Her grandparents? Even the rest of the coven members before her? Why hadn’t it come after her? Was she still under otherworldly protection? Now she was in the hands of a god that wanted to bring her the ultimate joy. It had been so long since she had let anyone touch her. Quince had destroyed that sense of trust, but with Lugh, Kalliope knew that he wouldn’t hurt her. Her heart told her that she was right. Sharren’s warning played through her mind. He was a blessing come to her, and even though Quince had a mistress, Lugh would not use her in that way. She drew in a breath and let the ice thaw around her soul. Finally, she relaxed into him and her heart quiver. It seemed that she had to follow her destiny no matter where it led her. That was what Constance had told her. Follow her heart and it would lead her to where she needed to be. Right now her heart told her she had to be in this man’s arms, supernatural creature or not.

“Only to bring you pleasure beyond your comprehension. Your heart’s desire drew my attention through the heavens and brought me here. Do you want me to make love to you? I can feel that you do, but I need you to say it,” he breathed into her ear.



Masquerade (Excerpt)

Cain was asleep when I awoke. The sunlight splayed yellow bars across his chest when I rose. I noticed in the light his skin was slightly red where it touched. I drifted out of bed quietly, wondering what it would be like to see this boy in the full light of day. Sadly that was something of an impossibility. Being awake, I had to fight the dangers of the sun. Just the thought of its rays on my skin made me shiver. I'd have to be careful when I met Veronica, so I had to dress accordingly. And like any good Goth girl, I was going to dress in style.

Choosing to wear a black miniskirt and peasant blouse, I threw my black leather corset over it all. When I finished lacing it up, the corset pushed up my tits. I looked through my closet, found long satin opera gloves, and slipped on my floor length cloak, pulling its hood low over my face. Before I left I needed one last moment with my midnight tryst. Leaning over, I nipped at his neck to feel the blood rushing underneath his perfect skin. The scent of him filled my nose: sweat, body odor, and the hint of aftershave from the day before. I lingered a moment at his jugular and took a deep breath, steadying myself as the beat of his heart drew me in. I knew better than to become entranced by the soft slow sound. I licked his throat quickly, sampling a small taste of myself on him, and then moved to his lips. Those I parted with my tongue, taking his bottom lip in my teeth. The curve of my fang caught the inside of his cheek, drawing blood. I savored the small amount of coppery sweetness as it clung to my canine and then mingled with my saliva. As the sensors in his body sent pain to his brain, he jumped out of a sound sleep. Cain opened sky-blue eyes and cringed at the sudden brightness. He put his hand up to block it until I could close the shutters. I almost laughed, but held my tongue. My lover's lips

were soft against mine, and he made my heart speed up, wanting to stay with him to pass the rest of the day. Difficult as it was, I pulled away as his hardness underneath the sheets pressed against my thigh. He wanted to keep me, while I wanted to possess him.

“You have to get going,” I whispered, surprised to feel the sadness of being separated. Normally, I just used those that crossed my path, but something about this Northerner was different. He made my brain foggy and tingly as if my psychic abilities were kicking in. But I shook off the thought. I wanted him to stay. There was something intoxicating about him that drove thoughts of Veronica from my mind. I didn’t know if it was the subtle pinkness of his bare chest or the way his slender fingers traced the hem of my cloak. I stood silently, wishing to remain, but I had other business.

He stretched, pushing back the hood of my cloak so he could stare into the face of the woman he had gone to bed with. There were no signs of disappointment. The hood fell away, allowing some of my hair to tumble into my face. He brushed that away too. I caught his hand, my fingers encircling his wrist. I stared into his eyes and flicked my tongue over the soft lines of his inner wrist.

“If you want me to leave, you shouldn’t do that,” he said. His voice was hoarse with impending passion.

I giggled, un-snaring myself from his hypnotic appeal and remembered my pressing business with Veronica. I licked his lips one last time, reluctantly moving off him. If I stayed any longer I would miss Veronica. Pulling the hood back over my face, I stared at him from its darkened depths.

“Last night was fun,” I whispered.

He got up, and then tugged on his socks and his boxers. I didn't remember where his pants were, but he found them under my bed. His shirt was nowhere in my room, but I was sure it was somewhere in the house, along with most of my clothes from the night before. Cain gazed at me, contemplating what to say. His emotions were easily read on his face and in his mind. He wondered if this one-night fling had some kind of potential. The sex was better than any he had before, and he craved that. I saw the lust in him as he undressed me again with his eyes.

"It was more than that," he finally whispered. "I think I'm in love. Don't you feel the attraction between us? You're something special. You could rule the world."

I laughed. "You're cute. And yes you're intoxicating. You make me forget that I have places to be. I wonder if you have some otherworldly power over me."

"You never know." He smiled devilishly as he kissed me again.

I had a hard time pulling myself away from him. I looked into his eyes and was almost caught. "I'm not busy tomorrow night if you want to get together again," I suggested.

"What time?"

I smiled, showing a hint of fang. "After sunset, of course."

"Of course!"

He stood by the door, scanning the bedroom while waiting for me to say something, but an awkward silence settled between us. I smiled and looked at the room myself, noticing how much I needed to dust. My eyes met his and I followed his gaze to my deck of tarot cards, which I had left spread out from the night before.

"You're psychic?" he asked.

“Yeah, since I was fifteen. You want me to pick a card for you?”

The corners of his eyes crunched up as he thought about my suggestion. For a moment, I detected something stirring beneath his composure, but I took it as his indecision.

“Sure,” he smiled. “But just one. You don’t want to be late.”

I got up and ran my hands over the backs of the cards. I concentrated on them, but the cards weren’t alive beneath my palm. They had no energy, which was strange. I shook my head, took a breath, and closed my eyes, focusing again, but my intuition didn’t kick in. There was nothing; only a hollowness where it should have been. It was as if the energy around my Northerner was dead; as if he wasn’t even in the room. Ignoring the deadness in my mind, I chose a card and pulled it out.

It was the Ace of Wands. My instincts told me nothing so I relied on the book definition of the card. It meant he had found a new passion in something and wanted more of it. In some cases possess the thing their mind was fixed on.

“Am I going to turn into demon and ravage you? Or will I come to a horrible demise at your hands?” His arms came around my waist and he pecked at my neck.

I smiled, settling back into him before I answered.

“Neither. It means you have a fiery heart and know how to re-root wherever you go.”

“Hmm...sounds promising. I agree with the fiery hardness, but... you smell so good. I could keep you busy for the rest of the night if you wanted.” His grip tightened on me.

“I wish,” I purred. “But for now, take this.”

I wrote my number on a scrap of paper. “Call me if something comes up.”

“Oh, I will.” He kissed me one last time and walked into the other room, finding his shirt.

The apartment door clicked shut and it was over until tomorrow night. A part of me missed him already. But that was only lust talking as I thought of the places he would ignite with his touch. I don’t know what it was about him that had all but pushed Veronica from my mind. Now, she most important thing and I couldn’t disappoint her.

